

Moving and Mixing

*The Fluid Liturgical Lives of Antiochian Orthodox and
Maronite Women Within the Protestant Churches in Lebanon*

Bewegen en Meng

*De fluïde liturgische levens van antiocheens-orthodoxe en maronitische
vrouwen in de protestantse kerken in Libanon*

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

Proefschrift

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To Wilbert

Christina and Pieter

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Chapter 1: General Introduction

Interpreters are not in one place or between places, but always crossing boundaries, always moving across. (Tweed, 181)

I. PEREGRINATION

I began to realize that there is something different about the way Easterners live their Christianity, when I attempted to explain to my Dutch (Reformed) husband things that I had thought were the most ordinary of all religious behaviors. It became clear that explaining Eastern practices to a westerner was not so simple! We realized that that not every practice we encountered together, in the beginning of his Lebanon experience, was ‘merely cultural’. On the contrary, many everyday practices were permeated with theology and Christian history, and I found myself eager to demonstrate to him that these traditions could not be dismissed offhand as ‘pagan’ and insignificant. My eagerness to do so baffled me. Ever since growing up as a Protestant among Eastern Christians in Lebanon, I had been conditioned to take the opposite position, and to dismiss many of the practices of the ‘other’ Christians as insignificant and misguided. However, a dawning understanding made me see a richness in my wider Christian culture for which I had thus far no real appreciation.

However, in looking back, I had to admit that all my life I had been practicing a kind of liturgical ‘translation’. My mother and her family, as well as my paternal grandmother, came from Antiochian (Greek) Orthodox backgrounds. Though I was clearly taught from childhood that I was strictly Protestant, I often did tag along with my mother to liturgical celebrations in the Orthodox Church, particularly during Holy Week. I attended home rituals at my grand-parents’ house, and ate fasting and feasting food etc. At the same time, I was taught in (Protestant) Sunday School, that all these traditions were not real piety but merely ‘outward manifestations’.

Due to the circumstances of war in Lebanon, my parents were obliged to enroll me in the next door Maronite school instead of the *Collège Protestant Français* across the border that separated east and west Beirut. In that school I was the only Protestant pupil and had to

camouflage my background in order to fit in. During my fourteen years there, I learned the Maronite/Catholic catechism, meditated on icons, participated in the weekly masses, and did my first communion.

Nevertheless, my ‘real’ Christian education came from my full and intense commitment to my Protestant Church. My father, grandfather and great-grandfather had all been pillars of that church. The Protestant faith is reflective, informed and active. Our church is connected historically to the American University of Beirut, and it stands for enlightenment and culture. It was founded by great American missionaries with whom my great-grandmother, and her daughter after her, witnessed as Bible women. My commitment to this faith and culture developed into a call and became my life and ministry. After my theological studies, I was appointed to lead the department of Christian Education and Spiritual Life in my Protestant Church. Besides teaching and developing curricula for Christian education I was involved in revising and rewriting liturgical texts, most of which were translations of American liturgies from the previous century. Through my teaching of Protestant young people and leading worship services for various age groups, and also being acquainted with the Orthodox and Maronite spiritual discourses, I began to see that there were many theological currents flowing through the church community. Eventually it became clear to me, through the behavior of the faithful and the discussions of young people, that ‘our’ Protestant discourse was not the only, not even the dominant, factor in many church members’ lives; a reality that cannot simply be ignored.

Years later, as I was applying for the program Living Reformed Theology at the *Vrije Universiteit* in Amsterdam, I was asked to formulate what my intended research would contribute to the context of my home Church. Still thinking in monolithic categories, I meant to investigate how the Protestant Church in Lebanon is ‘affected’ by the other Eastern Churches: mainly the two major ones: the Antiochian Orthodox and the Maronite. Yet, challenged by my supervisors, I had to let go of my focus on official and public liturgy, and look ‘lower’ at the lives of the people who inspired the question. From an initial interest in official and historic liturgical traditions, I shifted my focus to the particular liturgical lives of *some* people. Who are these people in whose life one sees the various traditions come together? How do they practice their Christianity? What do they do? Why do they do it? And what do they say about it? Although at first the aim of this research felt small in its

scope – looking at a few women in some churches– the data collected in the field proved to be very rich and challenging.

The questions raised by this data echoed the questions my western colleagues were asking in their research on European practices of faith. We were all struggling to make sense of the embodied aspects of worship and its contextual study. We had similar concerns and methods and our questions overlapped. Yet, the contexts we were studying differed in major ways. While my colleagues were studying a ‘secularized’ society, I was studying a world where God and religion were not only omnipresent but inseparable from society and culture. While they were rediscovering the role of performance, the body and the material, I was looking at liturgical worlds saturated with age-old performances and rituals. This contextual difference helped me to sharpen my views on my field and to look at what I had previously seen as ‘old and insignificant’ with renewed appreciation.

In this overview I will introduce the people whose liturgical lives I investigated. I will explain my approach and will situate this research in the wider academic discourse. I will then expound on my methodology and the process of analysis and publication. And finally I will give a summary of the various articles included here.

II. INTRODUCING THE FIELD AND THE RESEARCH PROCESS

This research looks at the liturgical lives of Lebanese women who originally come from Antiochian Orthodox Churches (Atiyyeh 2005, Hunt 2007) or Maronite Churches (Loosley and O’Mahony 2010, Galadza 2007) and who joined the Lebanese Protestant Churches by virtue of marriage (Badr 2005). Every year the minute Reformed Church in Lebanon adds to its numbers dozens of new female members through the door of intermarriage. The great majority of these women come from other Eastern Churches¹, mostly the Maronite Church and the Antiochian Orthodox Church. Bound by their own social obligations and abiding by tradition, these women must then join their husbands’ Church, where they are expected to act as Protestant congregants, without any official initiation or prior exposure to the Reformed faith and tradition.

¹ According to Church registries (1950–2009) these amount up to 90% of marriages.

The Protestant Church in Lebanon is a daughter of Anglo-Saxon missionary labor in the nineteenth century, particularly *The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* (ABCFM) (Badr 1992, Murre-van den Berg 2006, Makdisi, 2008). It has a liturgical heritage similar to that of its New England Reformed initiators. Though changes and adaptations occurred through time, many of its liturgical forms are inspired by the *Book of Common Worship* (1993) developed and used by the Presbyterian Church USA. Its Sunday liturgy and liturgical year confront those from Eastern traditions who join it, with a totally different spiritual reality than what they are used to and which they cherish. Eastern Churches with Byzantine and Syriac heritages, even if theologically and liturgically different from each other, share a certain *Antiochian* discourse (Chartouni 2007) and express their faith in a demonstrative style² far different from the didactic and verbal practice of the Protestant tradition.³ An undeniable clash exists between these two liturgical realities.

In this dissertation I look at women who moved from one liturgical tradition into another. My initial assumption was that the move was one way: from the Orthodox to the Protestant, or from the Maronite to the Protestant.⁴ I intended to investigate what the women bring with them, what they leave behind, and what they acquire in the new environment. However, the research immediately showed that it is not a move similar to migration⁵ or

² B. Varghese, *West Syrian Liturgical Theology: Liturgy, Worship and Society* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2004), p.7.

³ M. Barnard, J. Cillier, C. Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture, Liturgical-Ritual Studies, Fields and Methods, Concepts and Metaphors*, Liturgia Condenda (Leuven, Paris and Walpole: Peeters, 2014), chapter 2.

⁴ I therefore started by referring to them as Protestant women as is shown in the title of the very first published article: *Kinetics of Healing: Protestant Women Pledging Baptism in Saydnaya Orthodox Monastery* (here chapter 7). Later, I have realized that a more general 'Eastern Christian women' was a more adequate nomenclature.

⁵ Studies on religion and migration as well as identity and migration have informed my study greatly; T. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008); S. H. Lee, 'Liminality and Worship in the Korean American Context' in M.E Brinkman and D. van Keulen, *Christian identity in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2003); D. Koning, *Importing God: The Mission of the Ghanaian Adventist Church and Other Migrant Churches in the Netherlands*, (Amsterdam: VU dissertation, 2011); M. Krzyzanowski and R. Wodak, 'Multiple Identities, Migration and Belonging: 'Voices of Migrants' in C. R. Caldas-Coulthard and R.Iedema (eds.), *Identity Trouble: Critical Discourse and Contested Identities*; E. Maydell, *The Making of Cosmopolitan Selves: The Construction of Identity of Russian-speaking Immigrants in New Zealand* (Victoria University of Wellington, 2010).

conversion but a continuous movement and a creative mixing among several Christian traditions and spaces where borders proved to be porous.

However, it was first necessary to map the Lebanese ecclesial-liturgical landscape that forms the backdrop to the liturgical lives of these individual women. Based on literature review and an analysis of the liturgical documents, synodal documents, and hymnals, I compared the different liturgical traditions and identities involved. This was documented in my Master's Thesis: *The Liturgies in the Antiochian Orthodox and Maronite Churches and their Implications on the Liturgy in the Reformed Church in Lebanon* (MA, VU, 2009). An ethnographic-liturgical study followed in my Research Master's thesis: *The Liturgical Lives of Lebanese Maronite and Antiochian Orthodox Women Married to Protestant Men* (VU, 2010) in which the focus was on the lived liturgical realities of the women themselves. In order to answer the question, "*How do these women live their liturgical lives?*", I had to interact with the field. Hence, I conducted an empirical study and used ethnographic methods (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). Ethnography is defined as the researcher 'participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extend period of time watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions-- in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research'.⁶ By using ethnographic tools, the uniqueness of the liturgical experience of the individual women, their practices and their views were brought into light.

As liturgist Gerard Lukken points out "ritual practices differ from culture to culture", and they "can only be determined from the inside out, from within that culture itself".⁷ From within the culture and in full awareness of my involvement in it, I conducted in-depth interviews, collected spiritual autobiographies written for the purpose of this study, took pictures and videos and spent periods of time in active observation and participation in Lebanon (in 2009 and 2010). A total of 20 women were considered at that stage and the data collected was organized and presented in the Research Master's thesis.

⁶ M. Hammerley and P. Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), p.1.

⁷ G.M. Lukken, *Rituals in Abundance, Critical Reflection on the Place, Form and Identity of Christian Ritual in our Culture* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), p.10.

Out of this study, major liturgical and cultural–anthropological themes were identified for the purpose of in–depth analysis. The experience and perception of time, space and object/bodies proved to be complex, and their exploration important for the understanding of these particular liturgical lives. Within this three dimensional framework of time, space and matter the particular analysis of the practices of feasting, prayer, food/eating, icons/sacred objects, saints/virgin Mary, and holy places/pilgrimages deemed to be paramount. These practices and elements combined in various ways with themes such as: moving, making, collecting, arranging, and performing.

This dissertation picks up these themes from the empirical field and couples them with cultural–anthropological and theological discussions in order to understand what exactly is happening in these practices. Other rounds of empirical research were conducted during an additional 8 visits to Lebanon between 2011–2014 when follow up interviews took place, theories were tested, more participation was done and visual material was collected. During that time seven more women joined the research. Some of the women considered were enlisted as partners in checking the theories, in providing video recordings of certain aspects of their liturgical lives, and commenting on them.

A. Aim and Research Questions

This research looks at the *practices of faith* of *ordinary* people in their *everyday life*. Both from the perspective of the church and the academy, its aim is to understand these practices and the theology(ies) within them and to make them understandable. It is driven by the unnoticed (liturgical) realities of many women in the context of the Protestant Churches in Lebanon. By conducting this research, I bring this reality to light and invite the church, the academic world and the women themselves to acknowledge it and have a better understanding of it.

My main question is *How do these women live their liturgical lives and what theology(ies) do their practices enact?*

In order to answer this question, I started from the practices as observed, experienced and reflected upon in the field. Sub–questions emerged such as:

What does their continuous physical movement achieve liturgically?

How do they practice religious feasting and what experience does this evoke?

How do they deal with physical objects and sensory media such as icons, candles and incense?

How do they perform their home rituals and what do they express through them?

Why do they remain attached to the Virgin Mary?

What understanding of God and his involvement in the world is expressed in these practices?

B. Methodology

Starting from the ethnographic data, this research does not have a linear path but rather an iterative one. In what follows, I will outline the major stages in the methodology, while keeping in mind that they were not chronologically ordered steps.

Observation and Interpretation

With a view to variety and wider representation, I selected four Protestant congregations from different areas in Lebanon. ‘Gate keepers’, such as pastors, pastors’ wives, and women’s groups leaders, connected me to women they knew who were originally either Antiochian Orthodox or Maronite. Due to the small size of the Protestant community,⁸ many of these women were already known to me, even if the detail of their original church affiliation was not. Much of the data was collected from interviews, auto-biographies, informal chats, and participant observation in church liturgies, in private rituals, in pilgrimage trips and in celebrations of feasts.

The observation and the participation were at all times accompanied by interpretations and reflexivity. The practices considered revealed many aspects and layers in the practices of faith. These practices are embedded in and informed by doctrinal and confessional views, which in this case belong to several traditions and which are not clearly separated. Tracing and identifying the various flows in the practices was important. When possible, I investigated how certain aspects are understood and practiced in the Orthodox Church, in the Maronite Church and in the Protestant Church. Doctrinal but also historical tracing was

⁸ The Protestant Community in Lebanon in all its branches amounts to less than 1% of the population. An optimistic number of 75 000 members is proposed by the Supreme Council of Evangelical Churches in Lebanon which includes all Protestant and Evangelical churches: Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, Baptists, Church of God, Alliance Churches, Bretherens, Menonites, Seventh day Adventists, Quakers etc. My Focus was exclusively on the Reformed Churches.

important at every stage before analysis was possible. These three traditions are also layered, and many practices were colored by sub-flows such as Jesuit piety, protestant pietism, enlightenment legacies etc. All these layers are appropriated in personal ways by the women who create their own *bricolage*⁹ of practices and of concepts.

I look at these practices with concepts and theories from cultural-anthropology and sociology, as well as in terms of historical developments and doctrinal issues. Having identified the major themes, I frame them and analyze them with the help of theories from various disciplines. When considering the women as a ‘group’, the context of Eastern Christianity but more generally the context of late-modern society, hybridity and fluidity of religion is summoned. When looking at their icons and collections, for example, I first trace the advent of the objects and their historical and doctrinal trajectories and then I have recourse to studies in material religion and religious media to understand what these objects are ‘doing’ in practice.

In this manner every theme calls for a different set of disciplines. I reference late modern studies (Zygmund Bauman, Peter Sloterdijk, Arjun Appadurai), post-colonial studies (Edward Said, Talal Asad), anthropology and sociology of religion (Thomas Tweed, Manuel .A. Vasquez, Birgit Meyer), ritual studies (Jonathan Z. Smith, Ronald Grimes, Roy Rappaport, Victor Turner), migration studies, Eastern Christian studies (Heleen Mure-van den Berg, Bernard Heyberger, Willy Jansen), esthetics (David Morgan, Bruno Latour, W.J.T. Mitchell), and cognitive studies (Mark Johnson) to name few. However, the overarching concern is always the theological implications woven through the many perspectives. This research is thus trans-disciplinary as it interacts with many disciplines,¹⁰ giving them equal attention and connecting them to each other via the theological concern, in order to reach a holistic understanding of the practices.

⁹ A term coined by Lévi-Strauss and applied by Marcel Barnard to contemporary Liturgical practices; see Barnard, Cillier, Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, chapter 6.

¹⁰ Bonnie Miller McLemore underlines that such an approach is typical – though not exclusive– for women researchers “who resist the rigid, classificatory boundaries” see B. Miller McLemore, *Christian Theology in Practice: Discovering a Discipline*, p. 31.

Interaction with the field and reflexivity

Right from the outset, I acknowledge that my role and presence as a researcher, as a woman, as a Protestant theologian plays a role in shaping the research. This is an inescapable aspect of ethnographic work that I do not view with embarrassment but for which I intend to account.

Not only did my presence as researcher influence what the women said or how they behaved but it brought to the research my own agenda and convictions both theologically and culturally. Another researcher of a different sex, character, culture and theological convictions would write a very different dissertation with the same data. However, I do not see this as a weakness but as richness. The researcher is a tool in interpreting and analyzing. “The self is not some kind of virus which contaminates the research. On the contrary, the self is a research tool, and thus intimately connected to the methods we deploy”¹¹. My being a woman made the women share things they wouldn’t have shared otherwise. The spaces I could investigate, emotionally and physically – like stories of miscarriages or looking inside their bedrooms—would not have been possible otherwise. Not only am I a woman but also a trusted woman either known to them or trusted by the ‘gate keepers’.

In addition, the fact that my own mother is Orthodox and my school education was done in Maronite schools means that I am familiar with the discourse and culture of all three Churches and could formulate my questions in culturally sensitive ways. I am also familiar with the everyday details of rituals and faith in the other traditions. All this affected my relationship with the women, the way I accessed the data and the way I processed it. I used my character and my experience as a tool, but at the same time I was also aware that these same advantages could blind me to certain details and aspects of the field. However, at every stage I used triangulation, i.e. using at least “three overlapping but distinct angles of vision on a given project, each offered by virtue of a different method”.¹² My research consistently involved interviews, participant observation, autobiographies, facebook material, cross-

¹¹ M. Savin-Baden and C. Howell Major, *New approach to Qualitative Research, Wisdom and Uncertainty* (NY: Routledge, 2010), p.10. Ronald Grimes confirms this as well in, R. Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p.67.

¹² C. Scharen and A.M. Vigen (eds.), *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), p.230.

checking with the women, discussing with colleagues, document analysis, as well as other methods.

Moreover, it is not only the data, the methods, and the analysis that were affected by my presence and my views as a researcher, but so was the field. The research and field contact stretched over a period of five years. While some women presented a biography or took part in an interview only once, others continued to meet with me. They communicated in person or via email, facebook and dropbox, supplying information, feelings, video recordings and pictures. I was received in their homes and even taken along to their celebrations and events. Their views and their understanding of the research changed over time and so did their views of their own liturgical lives. Many women confessed that they had never seen anything special about their practices and beliefs, but that the research made them aware of aspects that they now cherish and cultivate. The research gave many women the feeling that their lives were interesting and their rituals valuable and special. This private and hidden aspect of their lives is now made known and public. The research displaces these lives out of the shadows to a more visible middle ground. It also makes their uniqueness visible in a positive way to their husbands and to many Church pastors with whom contact was made during the research. To a certain extent the research aimed at *engaging* the people studied rather than making them an object of study.

My own thoughts and opinions were also challenged during the process of the research and I took careful note of this as my research progressed. Trying to make sense of the practices of the women, and linking them with theories from various fields, flexed my views of what constitutes true Christian faith and practices. Focusing on ‘experience’ and looking at the theology in it, I came to agree with many womanist, feminist and post-modern theologians who ‘contend that experience is not simply a source for theology and ethics– it is the primary lens through which human beings access any and all scientific, moral, or theological knowledge’.¹³ Therefore, I can never claim to separate experience as a category alongside others but to accept that it is ‘the interpretative vehicle’¹⁴. Hence I, as a researcher, reflexively would look at my own changing experience, accept to be surprised and account for it.

¹³ *Ibid*, p.63.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.64.

A major factor I had to deal with was the ethical considerations. Do I have the right to enter into the most intimate spaces of these women? Can I look under their mattresses and pillows, video tape and then theorize and publish it to the whole world? Am I violating people's privacy and disrupting their lives? Writing is not neutral nor is it just a tool. James Clifford underlines that writing ethnographic results is 'writing up' and 'is caught up in invention, not representation, of cultures'.¹⁵ Therefore, I was as open as possible towards these women with whom a friendship developed. When possible, some of them were involved in the processing of the results by commenting on ideas I proposed or spontaneously volunteering information or checking on the reception of videos they filmed or papers I presented. Though the women were not secretive about their practices, I chose to use pseudonyms in order to shield them. Treading between academic rigor, ethical considerations and my own convictions was an ongoing challenge. On the other hand, the ethical considerations were not always negative challenges. Indeed, this research by itself has an ethical contribution, as it tries to value people's experiences and views and presenting this kind of Christianity to the world.

III. FRAMING THE RESEARCH

This research is built on an alternative view of theology that is gaining ground today in many circles, particularly in the field of Practical Theology. What I do here is look at *practices of faith of ordinary people in their everyday life*. This view takes particular and embodied faith practices seriously and arises from ethnographic realities, in order to listen to people rather than speak about them. Christian Scharen and Anna Marie Vigen are the names most associated with such an approach, while neither being the first nor alone in embracing it. Taking Scharen and Vigen's proposal as a general frame for my research, this approach to theology harmonizes with trends in practical theology represented by theologians such as Bonnie Miller McLemore and Barabara McClure. In particular it takes shape in the field of Liturgical-ritual studies with theologians such as Marcel Barnard,¹⁶ Cas wepener, Johan Cilliers, Paul Post, Mirella Klomp and Mary McGann.

¹⁵ J. Clifford and G. Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley, LA, and London: University of California Press, 1986), p.2.

¹⁶ Barnard, Cilliers, Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, chapter 2.

Looking at Practices of Faith

Beginning with *context* is an approach promoted by contextual theology as well as liberation, feminist, black, womanist, local and other theologies.¹⁷ What theologians such as Scharen and Vigen do is to develop these approaches further and focus on thick descriptions of practices and interaction with marginal realities. They build on epistemological insights gained from Foucault and Bourdieu that disturb modern assumptions about the relation between theory and practice and ‘claim the place of knowledge is embedded in forms of life, or to put it simply, in practice’¹⁸. They therefore invite theologians to debug this knowledge with their own bodies.¹⁹ The recent turn to practice in the academy brought forth new categories such as lived religion, ordinary theology, public theology, embodied²⁰ or empirical theology – categories previously denigrated under the heading of *folk religion*. This new approach of ‘breaking the dichotomy between empirical research of the social sciences and the normative theological’,²¹ challenges the limits, the location, and the manner of doing theology.

Today’s field of liturgical–ritual studies fleshes out these new practical theological premises. The field of liturgy has been traditionally understood as the study of liturgical history or documents.²² The Protestant study of liturgy has been particularly guilty of this biased focus on texts. However, recently the field of liturgical–ritual studies has experienced a shift to focus on the cultural– anthropological alongside theology. The department of *Practices* in the Protestant Theological University (PThU) expands on this aspect in its research program entitled ‘Practices of Faith in Socio–cultural Networks’ where it invites research on faith practices in ‘their realistic appearance, that is, as they are embodied, minded and performed’.²³ Marcel Barnard underlines this close connection and the dynamic relation

¹⁷ Such as Contextual theology, Liberation theology and Local theology.

¹⁸ Scharen and Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology*, p.33.

¹⁹ An insight from Maurice Merleau–Ponty. *Phénoménologie de la Perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945).

²⁰ Scaren and Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology*, p.xxi.

²¹ Scaren and Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology*, p.xii.

²² P. Bradshaw and J. Melloh (eds.), *Foundations in Ritual Studies: A reader for students of Christian worship* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academy, 2007), p.vii; Lukken, *Rituals in Abundance*, p.359.

²³ Webiste of PThU: <http://www.pthu.nl/onderzoek/programmas/onderzoeksprogramma-practices/>

between worship and culture.²⁴ Barnard says ‘protestant identity in liturgy and spirituality has to be reconstructed by integrating the cultural-anthropological perspective into the theological discourse’.²⁵ Others in the field of liturgical studies underline the value of understanding ritual in its practice. Paul Bradshaw and John Melloh anchor the field in the work of scholars such as Mary Douglas, Victor Turner, Roy Rappaport, Ronald Grimes, Catherine Bell and others, making these non-theologians vital partners for liturgical studies. In their book they start with Romano Guardini’s open letter²⁶ as the herald of the turn to ritual, to the body, actions, time, and place.

Embodied Theological Knowledge

This focus on practices and the use of ethnography to investigate them has epistemological implications. Besides the more traditional alleys for theological knowledge I embrace what Christian Scharen calls theology *from* the body.²⁷ It is a theology that is in the ‘bodies’ of the people I look at but also deciphered by my ‘body’. In this research, I looked not only at the practices of the women but I also sat for hours in the contexts and liturgies they described: smelling, touching, tasting and looking. I tried to emulate the home rituals they explained, by eating food they ate and activating my ‘corporal intelligence’ as Merleau Ponty would put it. This ‘intelligence’ was already acquired in my childhood as I participated week after week in Maronite liturgies, season after season in Orthodox celebrations and traditions, and on a daily basis in the Protestant community. This *bodily intelligence* had been, for me, separated by barriers from *academic intelligence*. This had created fear and confusion at how these two sides fit together, as well as anger at being forced to be confined to either side of the border. Embracing this approach to (Practical) theology has now opened up pathways between the various facets and forms of intelligence I know. But it is an approach that it is not without risks. There is the danger of subjectivity and the relativity of truth, and the risk to vulnerability for the researcher. In this case I have utilized multiple sources and

²⁴ M. Barnard, *Liturgiek als Wetenschap van Christelijke Riten en Symbolen* (Amsterdam: VU Amsterdam, 2010) p.5.

²⁵ M. Barnard, ‘Reconstructing Protestant Identity in Liturgy and Spirituality: the Need to Integrate Anthropology in Theological Liturgical Discourse’ in Volker Küster (ed.), *Reshaping Protestantism in a Global Context* (Berlin, Munster, Wien, Zurich, London: Lit Verlag, 2009), p.210.

²⁶ R. Guardini, ‘Open Letter’, in Bradshaw and Melloh (eds.), *Foundations in Ritual Studies*, p.4.

²⁷ Scharen and Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology*, p.30.

triangulation to put *experience* in the larger web of sources of knowledge for theology such as tradition, scripture, doctrines etc.

Ordinary People

In her presidential address at the International Academy of Practical Theology (2011), Miller-McLemore declares that we no longer live in a time where ‘theological scholars rule over pastors and laity as the bottom feeders of theological knowledge’²⁸. On the contrary ‘Fresh appreciation for religious practice, performance, case studies, the knowledge in the particular, material culture, and so forth has occurred across the academy’.²⁹

Many strands in theology today take culture and context very seriously. However, in general, most theological discourse is with and among professionals. Conversely, my research considers *ordinary* believers –the theologically non-professional. Looking at the lives of ordinary Christians ‘makes the bold claim that what non-academics think, live, know, practice, do and experience matter in a *fundamental* way’.³⁰ In the same line Barnard emphasizes that liturgical ritual should be understood ‘from the perspective of its participants or performers’.³¹ In this sense I take the priesthood of all believers seriously. The academic and clerical ‘captivity’³² of theology has in my opinion ethical and theological consequences that cannot be ignored and can even be considered oppressive. The ordinary people I consider in this research are celebrated in their particularity, as women and as Middle Easterners.³³ This is a category of believers that has never before been considered as relevant for Christian theology. In order to uphold the catholicity of the Church, Christian theology, I believe, should take into consideration the experiences and thoughts of all believers equally and collectively, including their historical, cultural, geographical, ethnic, age, and gender diversity.

²⁸ B. Miller McLemore, ‘Five Misunderstandings about Practical Theology’ in *IJPT* 2012, 16(1), 5–26, p.10.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p.10.

³⁰ Scharen and Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology*, p.67. (emphasis original)

³¹ Barnard, Cilliers, Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, chapter 2.

³² Cf. B. Miller-McLemore, ‘Five Misunderstandings about Practical Theology’.

³³ The research takes as a starting point the ethnographic reality of these women but is also informed by the work of scholars such as Nikkie R. Keddi, Willy Jansen, Heleen Mure van den Berg, Mirna Lattouf, Ruth Roded; Ellen Fleischmann; Kristen Lindner; who mostly approach the topic from a socio-historical perspective.

The Everyday Life

While affirming that ‘Practical Theology is not an easily defined category’,³⁴ Miller-McLemore emphasizes that it is ‘a general way of doing theology concerned with the embodiment of religious belief in the day-to-day lives of individuals and communities’.³⁵ Theology, Practical Theology and in particular liturgical studies focus traditionally on the Church and ecclesial rituals and events. However, accompanying the turn to practice and to the ordinary person is a turn to the everyday. Inspired by Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life*, I side with theologians who find theology also in the quotidian and beyond the walls of the Church and its documents. In this context, the women considered are not theologians nor do they form an independent ecclesial community. They are ‘users’ of religion, in de Certeau’s words, and they operate within and across the institutional Church, yet are not confined to it. The ethnographic findings themselves invite, even demand, that we consider the entirety of their lives in order to understand their theologies. The church (or churches) is here not overlooked, but it covers only one area of the life of these faithful. Theology on the other hand is worked out and expressed in the details of their lives as they maneuver their way across the complex realities of life and its interconnectedness. Therefore, I had to literally investigate every corner of their houses, every object in their cars, and every aspect of their work, relationships and movements. When I first embarked on this project a systematic theologian at the university jokingly suggested that I write a cook book. Though in that context it was not meant entirely seriously, in the course of this research I found not only the recipes the women used, but also the manner of cooking as well as their shopping lists to be revelatory.

Using this approach I recognize with Scharen and Vigen that there is a ‘blurring of borders’ between disciplines, and that theology is not as neatly defined as it used to be. However, connecting the many disciplines and looking at areas previously not considered theological, I wonder with Mary McClintock Fulkerson as she asks: ‘So which part of the life of a Christian community is ‘theological’ or theologically ethical?’.³⁶

³⁴ B. Miller-McLemore, ‘Five Misunderstandings about Practical Theology’, p.19.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p.20.

³⁶ Scharen and Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology*, Preface.

A Trinitarian Grounding

A theological approach requires a theological conviction. My decision to consider the practices of faith of ordinary people in their everyday life via ethnographic methods is anchored in, and reflects, a Christian Trinitarian conviction.

This approach takes *creation*³⁷ in its goodness and brokenness, *incarnation* in history and the flesh, and the continued *sustenance* of this world seriously. This Trinitarian approach has serious theological implications for how we approach the material world, the complexity of culture, human beings, and their everyday life. It is one way to heed Martin Luther's call 'to honor God's handiwork'.³⁸ Yet it is not only creation and the material world that I look at but also the *particular*: particular women in a particular context. Particularity is considered both an academic and a theological scandal. Yet, though universality and generalizable results are still used as the norm in the academic world, many thinkers have been refuting this trend to 'timeless, aspatial formula'³⁹ and the longing for generalization. In addition, the value of the particular is anchored in the most fundamental Christian claim, that of 'the scandal of particularity' in Jesus Christ.⁴⁰ The incarnation tells us that it is precisely in the particular that God revealed himself. With this conviction I look at the particular as it is *embodied, spatial and temporal*. By this I agree with Bonnie Miller McLemore who points out that 'Creative work on theological knowledge must grapple with how it is enacted in the world'.⁴¹ Finally, by looking at the everyday life of believers I affirm the continuous and non-restricted work of the Holy Spirit in all aspects of life.

However, by saying that faith, theology, culture and the body are enmeshed, I do not deny the need for critical interplay between these, and with other sources and forms of theology, to insure both continuity and new insights.

³⁷ Cf. M. E. Brinkman, *Sacrament of Freedom: Ecumenical Essays on Creation and Sacrament-Justice and Freedom* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 1999), in particular chapter 4.

³⁸ Quoted in Scharen and Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology*, p.73.

³⁹ Ch. Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p.176.

⁴⁰ Scharen and Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology*, p.28.

⁴¹ Miller-McLemore, 'Five Misunderstandings about Practical Theology', p.15.

IV. A THEOLOGY IN MOTION

My approach to this topic has necessitated openness to a variety of particular Christian experiences, and to the unexpected in life. So far I have fleshed out a certain approach to theology that I have embraced. Yet turning to the women themselves, I see liturgical lives and faith practices that often reveal a mingling of different theologies but have certain common themes. These theologies are the actual ‘object’ of study of this research. As I look and listen to the women, I decipher theologies that are shaken by the continuous movement, and sometimes contradiction, among the Liturgical traditions, discourses and ontology. This ‘shaking’ or destabilizing of theological convictions is accompanied by a revitalizing energy that drives the women into creative ‘solutions’. These take shape in fluid and varied practices embodying theologies that are neither Orthodox, Maronite, nor Protestant, but are personal hybrid theologies that are able to accommodate and cope with all of them. The image of God, the way one relates to God, and the way God relates to creation is redefined, as I show in the various articles in this dissertation. In the conclusion I will come back to this topic and propose ways for looking at these theologies.

A Kaleidoscopic approach

The results of my research are presented in six articles. The articles are discussions of separate themes that emerged from the empirical data. Though they do overlap and have some recurring notions, they are neither linear nor hierarchical. Each article presented here is like ‘the spoke of a wheel – a new beginning from a common center’.⁴²

I came to the focus of this study having traveled various routes that crossed together: my own liturgically complex childhood, my cross-cultural marriage, my work in a Lebanese Protestant Church, joining the Living Reformed Theology program at the *VU* and the stimulating ‘compound’ of my supervisors and their questions. Just as all these various and independent alleys met in the focus of this study, so the articles that came out of it also stem from the center but go in various (though not contradictory) directions.

From the analysis of the empirical data a number of motifs in different fields emerged. The importance of the body, of material objects, of enactment and performance, of physical

⁴² To use an image from Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies*.

movement, and of practical doing was visible on the anthropological and cultural level. On the other hand a need for healing, the importance of feasting, a search for a sense of divine presence, an experience of a feminine dimension of the divine, and an alternative route for religious knowledge, were also perceived from a more theological angle. The six articles that make up this dissertation are the result of various combinations and correlations between these sets of motifs.

In each article I offer sketches and snapshots which, when put together, give an idea and introduce a world but do not cover everything. As Clifford says ‘Cultures do not hold still for their portraits’.⁴³ Though each article grapples with sets of motifs in order to make sense of them and present a ‘conclusion’ I also respect the fact that ‘ethnography ought not attempt to tidy the messy contradictions it may find or create a false sense of unity, homogeneity, synthesis’.⁴⁴

Metaphors rather than clear cut theories are thus presented. The articles all begin with an illustrative example from the ‘field’ and try to use as much ethnographic material as possible in order to convey ‘a story’. Five of the articles were written for the purpose of the dissertation. Only one article: ‘Kinetics of Healing: Protestant Women Pledging Baptism in Saydnaya Orthodox Monastery’ published in *Studia Liturgica* (42), 2012, pp.270–284, started as a presentation in the congress of *Societas Liturgica* in 2011 on the topic of Baptism. It therefore speaks to the topic of the congress as well as the themes from the empirical data, particularly the themes of physical movement and healing. It expands on why Lebanese women and these women in particular, long for healing and how physical movement between and inside holy places and events provide them space to find healing. Though it was the first article written, I present it as the Sixth chapter in this list.

The rest of the articles are arranged chronologically but with no hierarchical implications.

The first article in Chapter 2: ‘Taking Liberties: The Fluid Liturgical Lives of Orthodox and Maronite Women Within the Protestant Church in Lebanon’ is published in the *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 65 (1–2), pp. 97–119. It describes the group of women in the study, and locates their place in late modern parameters and in their Eastern Christian

⁴³ Clifford and Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture*, p.10.

⁴⁴ Scharen and Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology*, p.69.

context. The article gives a general idea of what happens to the women and how they deal with their liturgical complexities and the institutions that host them.

The second article in Chapter 3: “Itinerant Feasting: Eastern Christian Women Negotiating (Physical) Presence in the Celebration of Easter” is published in the journal *Exchange: Journal for Missiological and Ecumenical Research* 42 (2013), pp. 319–342. Feasting in general has shown to be an important theme for the women, in particular the difference in the manner and performance of feasting in the various traditions. I chose to focus on the celebration of Easter in particular, though other feasts could have also been possible. In this article, I look at the experience of particular ecclesial spaces and liturgical times, and their effect on the bodily awareness of the ‘presence’ of Christ in the way the women construct their own feasting styles.

The third Article in Chapter 4 is entitled ‘Rearranging Things: How Protestant attitudes shake the Objects in the Piety of Eastern Christian Women’ and is accepted to be published by the Journal for Material Religion *MR*. This article focuses on the material objects in the piety of the women. In varying degrees, the women collect many sacred objects that they often display in their homes and use in a number of ways. Yet these objects do not stand unquestioned. On the contrary, they are challenged by the presence of the Protestant tradition. In this article I look at the role of visuals and material objects, at the trajectory of each type of object present, and at their fate and their revised function in the new piety.

The fourth article in Chapter 5 is ‘Kinesthetic Piety: Eastern Christian women’s varying practices in Protestant homes’ and is accepted by the Journal *Quéstions Liturgiques*. In this article I offer a peek inside the homes of the women to discover a world of varied home rituals. As I invite the readers to look at what the women do in the privacy of their home to relate to the divine, I sketch the image of God that is revealed in them.

The sixth article presented in Chapter 7 is ‘Which Mary? Eastern Christian women bringing their Mary into the Lebanese Protestant Church’ and is accepted by the journal *Mission Studies: Journal of the International Association for Mission Studies*. The topic of Mary is slightly different than the other themes since it concerns a relationship and a perception of a person rather than a practice. Yet, ignoring the topic of Mary would distort the practices of the women and rob the readers of an important layer in their perception and experience of the divine. In this article I look at the images of Mary available in the environment of the

women. I focus on the personal selection of these images, and their interaction with meaningful personal images, and what these convey about their image of God.

The articles presented here are illustrations of personal faiths, and are therefore not exhaustive of the topic. More articles can be added and other combinations of motifs can be made. As, Miller-McLemore reminds: the study of Practical Theology ‘is an open-ended contingent, unfinished grasp or analysis of faith in action’.⁴⁵

The articles in this dissertation were published as co-authorships with one, two or three others. The co-authors are my supervisors: Prof. Dr. Marcel Barnard, Prof. Dr. Heleen Murre-van den Berg and Prof. Dr. Martien E. Brinkman who each, with their particular expertise, guided and framed the many aspects of my research. The three supervisors come from different disciplines and different universities which kept the research vibrant and broad in perspective. The many perspectives of the research found an echo in the inspiration of my three supervisors, where theology, history, rituals and esthetics crossed. Every article had a different ‘color’ and was proposed to a double blinded peer reviewed disciplinary journal that matched its particular angle and field. To this date, three of the articles have been published, one accepted and two were submitted for peer-review. The articles are assembled here and kept as far as possible in the style of the journal, which explains the differences in referencing methods and layouts.

⁴⁵B. Miller McLemore, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology* (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2012), p.14.



Grandmother sharing Qurban with her grand-daughter

Photo: R. Nasrallah

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Chapter 2: Taking Liberties

The fluid liturgical lives of Orthodox and Maronite women within the Protestant Church in Lebanon

I. INTRODUCTION

The pipe organ starts playing Wagner's Bridal Chorus as Maria gracefully glides down the aisle of the beautifully decorated Protestant church of Beirut. Her groom is nervously waiting for her by the pulpit while behind him three clergy men in mismatching gowns are exchanging slips of paper and adjusting the microphones. The Protestant pastor of the hosting church has assigned the Maronite Priest as well as the Orthodox Priest each their segment of the service. The Maronite priest, unknown to this church, has travelled a long distance to assist in the wedding at the request of the Maronite mother of the groom; he is her village priest. The Orthodox priest had a shorter trip but a less pleasant one; Maria is a 'leaving' parish member and her parents have asked him to honor the event with his presence.

As the first hymn starts, only the five first rows to the right of the church could join the singing, they are the direct family of the groom. The epistle was read in a Maronite style, the gospel was chanted to a Byzantine tune then the Protestant pastor gave a short sermon. At the signing of the register, a soloist sang the Ave Maria and the service ended with two men rushing to the front and with very powerful voices chanted the traditional Orthodox crowning hymn. The Maronite priest returned to his village, the Orthodox priest accompanied the parents of the bride and Maria joined the Protestants. The three distinct Churches that joined on her wedding day separated never to meet again in her life. Just like many women in her position, it is now up to Maria to forge her own liturgical life in the context of the Protestant Church and decide which way to go.

The ecclesial and liturgical Lebanese map looks very clearly marked by a variety of church communities. Their churches are located in nice buildings with gates and fences and

records of memberships. Each community is highly aware of its liturgical tradition and conscious of the number of its adherents whose denomination is mentioned on their identity cards. In this paper we shall take a closer look at this map as we highlight movements and commuting that take place between these churches. We show how fences and gates are crossed from various directions and in many different ways. By taking the example of some other ‘Marias’ – Lebanese women from Antiochian (Greek/Rūm) Orthodox or from Maronite background marrying Protestant men—we show how the crossing and moving between traditions creates fluid liturgical lives that stand critically in the face of the illusion and aspirations for liturgical purity on the part of the ecclesial structures.

II. STUDYING MOTION IN THE LITURGICAL FIELD: FOLLOWING THE FLOW

MOTION

Movement is a theme that characterizes our late modern society. The study of physical movement between geographical places, such as migration, Diaspora, and travel, as well as movement of concepts and traditions occupy academics from all disciplines. Leading thinkers, such as Peter Sloterdijk⁴⁶, Zygmund Bauman⁴⁷ and Arjun Appadurai⁴⁸ have exposed this kinetic aspect of our culture extensively. The time–space compression and distancing accelerated trends that are not altogether new in history but that force us to look with different eyes at practices and realities in our contemporary ‘liquid’, ‘fluid’ or ‘foamy’ modernity.

Sociologists of Religion in their turn are focusing on the particular effect of these movements on religion and its methods of study. Thomas Tweed⁴⁹ and Manuel Vásquez⁵⁰, for example, each in his own way, try to make sense of the massive and complex

⁴⁶ Peter Sloterdijk, *Stären III: Schaüme*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004).

⁴⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000).

⁴⁸ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *Globalization* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001).

⁴⁹ Thomas Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008).

⁵⁰ Manuel A. Vásquez, ‘Studying Religion in Motion: A Networks Approach’, in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 20, 2008, 151–184; Vásquez and Friedmann Marquardt, *Globalizing the sacred: Religion Across the Americas* (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

movements in relation to religion. Denouncing, together with post-colonial scholars⁵¹, the hegemony of Western modern categories in religion where dualism reigns between ‘private and public, symbol and matter, and society and religion’,⁵² they advocate taking into account ‘movement, relation, and position’.⁵³ Religion can therefore no more be studied as an isolated subject, separated and confined within the walls of its traditional localities, i.e. church tradition, ecclesial texts and symbols. Escaping reductionism and striving to do justice to the complex realities of lived religion, the practitioners of religion and their interpretations of their practices are enlisted as major informants. In addition, the study of religion is to embrace the whole of these practices, including just as much the material parts of it as its spiritual and cognitive aspects. The study of religion is facing a cartography where space is flexible and time is compressed, where people are moving and carrying with them a religiosity that tends to change, adapt and challenge other categories of religiosities.

Moving away from the exclusive study of texts and manuscripts, liturgical scholars have to take into account not only liturgical practices but also their lability and the kind of movements outside the traditional setting that will be studied in this essay.⁵⁴ Just as global movements create fluid societies, so do pious people moving between various religious traditions create fluid liturgical lives. One way to study these lives is to ‘follow the flow’⁵⁵ or to flow with the flow. By considering the whole spectrum of movement, places and objects we refrain from attempting to fixate and locate dynamic arrangements while acknowledging that we balance on uncertain grounds. In this paper we follow one such flow in liturgical practices, a flow created by the movement between two (or more) strikingly different liturgical traditions in the lives of people who escape modern categories of liturgical practices. It is in the way they move around between traditions that they attract

⁵¹ Such as Talal Asad, *Formation of the Secular: Christianity, Islam and Modernity* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003).

⁵² Vásquez, ‘Studying Religion in Motion’, p.156; more on this in Vásquez and Marquardt, *Globalizing the sacred*.

⁵³ Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, p.182.

⁵⁴ Marcel Barnard, Johan Cilliers, Cas Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture. Liturgical-Ritual Studies, Fields and Methods, Concepts and Metaphores* (Liturgia Condenda, Leuven-Paris-Walpole, Forthcoming); Cas Wepener, ‘Researching Rituals: on the use of Participatory Action Research in Liturgical Studie’ in *Praktiese Teologie in Suid-Afrika*, 2005, 20/1, pp.109–127; Gerard Lukken, *Rituals in Abundance. Critical Reflections on the Place, Form and Identity of Christian Ritual on Our Culture* (Liturgia Condenda, Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2005). A plea made as well by anthropologists who value the study of local religion, see for example Henk Driessen, ‘Local Religion Revisited: Mediterranean Cases’ in *History and Anthropology*, Vol. 20, no.3, September 2009, pp.281–288.

⁵⁵ See Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*.

our attention, and by their wandering they create realities that can be labeled today as late-modern, while some as unorthodox when considered from a certain ecclesial perspective.

LEBANESE CONTEXT FOR FLOWS

The afore-mentioned scholars reflect on the effects of movement and the resulting fluidity and foaminess of society, mainly in the context of Western society. While striving to live within modernist parameters of segregation, purity and rationality, Western society was shaken by the encounter with other non-modernist discourses brought to the West with every new wave of migration from Asia, Africa and Latin America. Looking at Lebanon we see the opposite move but with similar effects, as it is the case in many non-Western countries that traditionally were fields of missionary activity. The many Western currents that passed through and interacted with that geographical area have tried to ‘domesticate’ these blurred, mixed and varied religious practices⁵⁶ in ‘multireligious world necessarily operat(ing) outside the realm of formal texts and prescriptions’.⁵⁷ The modernist context that was created around the various religious traditions have tried to purify and demarcate the theological and liturgical map in various ways.⁵⁸ Historically there have been many attempts to purify, clarify and solidify these liturgies and liturgical styles either by Western missionaries, by their local trainees and students,⁵⁹ or by subsequent cultural confluences. As early as the 14th century the Maronite Church was subjected to Franciscan reforms,⁶⁰ followed by Jesuit purification by means of Latinization⁶¹ in the 18th century, and ending by a new attempt to self-demarcate identity by the Maronite Synod.⁶² The Rūm Orthodox church, though less westernized than others, got caught up in the trend to fixate and clarify

⁵⁶ Bernard Heyberger (ed.), *Chrétiens du Monde Arabe, Archipel en Terre D’Islam* (Paris: Editions Autrement, 2003). A reality not only visible in Lebanon but in the whole Mediterranean world, see Driessen, *Local Religion Revisited*, p.284.

⁵⁷ Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven, American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (USA: Cornell University Press, 2008) p.47.

⁵⁸ Cf. Heleen Murre-van den Berg, ‘The Study of Western Missions in The Middle East (1820–1920): an annotated Bibliography’, in Norbert Friedrich, Uwe Kaminsky, Roland Löffler (eds.) *The Social Dimension of Christian Missions in the Middle East: Historical Studies of the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2010), 35–53.

⁵⁹ See the case of Assad el Shidiac in Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven*.

⁶⁰ Jean-Pierre Valognes, *Vie et Mort des Chrétiens D’Orient, des Origines à nos Jours*, (Paris: Fayard, 1994), pp. 77–82.

⁶¹ Willy Jansen, ‘Demanding a Religious Place, Three Female Christian Visionaries in the Middle East’, in *Journal of Eastern Christian studies* (63) issue 3–4, 2011 pp.311–332; Christine B. Lindner, *Negotiating the Field: American Protestant Missionaries in Ottoman Syria, 1823 to 1860* (University of Edinburgh, 2009).

⁶² *The Maronite Patriarchal Council, Texts and Recommendations* (Bkerke: Bkerke, 2006).

liturgical tradition by resorting to the Greeks and then the Russians in the 19th century,⁶³ moving subsequently towards a rediscovery of an Antiochian heritage in the hope to distinguish it from other Eastern Orthodox traditions, thus labeling itself Antiochian Orthodox.⁶⁴ As for the Protestant tradition, it is part and parcel of its existence in Lebanon to be marked by a modern mentality⁶⁵ of purity, separation and demarcation.⁶⁶ Right from the beginning in the 19th century, the Anglo-American missionaries made sure to clarify what is and what is not Protestant, i.e. acceptable or not-acceptable. Missionary teachings, sermons and letters focused on underlining the difference with the other traditions and cautioning or disapproving of any behavior that remotely resembles the 'papists'.⁶⁷

Good ecumenical relations and coexistence in the second half of the twentieth century did not lead to dissolve clear separation and demarcation. On the contrary, it emphasized even more the borders around each liturgical family, as each tradition was compelled to be clear on its own position before entering in dialogue with the others. While ecclesial structures, past Western missionaries and documents, as well as global ecclesial interactions have done their share of purifying and solidifying, the people practicing the various traditions had other experiences. The women we look at in this research reflect another facet of the liturgical realities in Lebanon. Due to their marriage to a man from another Christian tradition, they were impelled to begin a life of liturgical movement engendering a fluid

⁶³ Valognes, *Vie et Mort des Chrétiens D'Orient*, pp. 82-84.

⁶⁴ *Tareekh Kanissat Antaqia lil Rūm el Orthodox: Ayyat Khoṣoṣiya?* (*The History of the Rūmī Antiochian Orthodox Church: What Specificity?*) (Bouar: Balamand Publications, 1999).

⁶⁵ Ussama Makdisi, 'Reclaiming the Land of the Bible: Missionaries, Secularism and Evangelical Modernity', in *The American Historical Review*, vol. 102 (1997), pp. 680-713.

⁶⁶ At least since the 1840s when the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Mission's secretary, Rufus Anderson steered the mission towards separation and formation of a distinct native Protestant Church. See: Habib Badr, *Mission to "Nominal Christians": The Policy and Practice of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and its Missionaries Concerning Eastern Churches which led to the Organization of a Protestant Church in Beirut (1819-1848)* (Ph.D. thesis, Princeton, NJ, 1992); Heleen Murre-van Den Berg, 'Why Protestant Churches? The American Board and The Eastern Churches: Mission among Nominal Christians (1820-1870)', in Pieter N. Holtrop and Hugh McLeod (eds.), *Mission and Missionaries*, (Boydell Press, 2000).

⁶⁷ Habib Badr, 'Evangelical Missions and Churches in the Middle East: Lebanon, Syria and Turkey', in Habib Badr (ed.) *Christianity: A History in the Middle East* (Beirut: Middle East Council of Churches [MECC], 2005); Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven*; and Heleen Murre-van den Berg, (ed.), *New Faiths in Ancient Lands: Western Missions in the Middle East in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Heleen Murre-van den Berg, 'Simply by giving to them macaroni...' Anti-Roman Catholic polemics in early Protestant missions in the Middle East, 1820-1860', in Martin Tamcke, Michael Marten (eds), *Christian Witness Between Continuity and New Beginnings. Modern Historical Missions to the Middle East* (Lit.Verlag Berlin 2006), 63-80. Christine B. Lindner, *Negotiating the Field*; Henry Jessup, *Fifty-Three Years in Syria, Volume II* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1910).

liturgical existence. Parallel to the movements observed and studied by Tweed and Vásquez between Latin and North American religious settings, so do the women considered here experience a movement between two radically opposite understandings of liturgical practices and discourse. Yet unlike migrant communities, or communities in the Diaspora, the movement of the women studied in this research is not a group movement nor is it organized, localized or repeatable. However, despite the many differences, studies and theories on migration and crossings of religious communities can help in understanding the flowing liturgical lives of these women. In his evaluation of his theory of crossing and dwelling, Tweed himself suggests that theories such as his accounting for movement might be particularly helpful for the study of ‘the religious practices of women who have been marginalized or ignored in some other theories’.⁶⁸

WOMEN IN FLUX

In the example of Maria’s wedding we have seen how three liturgical traditions have come together yet remained separate. In an attempt to please all the parties involved in this wedding, the liturgical experts, i.e. the clergymen, juxtaposed fragments from different liturgical traditions into one patchwork. The various elements were as easily dismantled from the liturgy as they were built into it. Maria herself had nothing to do with this creation, except agreeing that the various members of the wedding party, the groom, her parents and her mother in law, have their wishes met by affixing their cherished rubrics into it. It is after the wedding ceremony is finished that Maria can start her own quest for a self-made liturgical life.

In the miniscule and rather new Lebanese Protestant Church, the great majority of the weddings are weddings between a Protestant man and a non-Protestant woman.⁶⁹ Most of these women come from Maronite and Antiochian Orthodox churches. These Churches though well separated and demarcated through a history of similar identity affirmations and modernization, express different discourses in their liturgical heritages. The Protestant Church is a direct descendant of the New England Reformed Church of the late 19th early

⁶⁸ Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, p.166.

⁶⁹ According to the marriage register (1950–2009) of the National Evangelical Church of Beirut, one of the largest and oldest Protestant Churches in Lebanon, up to 90% of the marriages are between a Protestant man and non-Protestant Christian woman.

20th century;⁷⁰ its liturgy is a translation with slight adaptation of the mother liturgy.⁷¹ The Maronite Church, though heavily theologically Latinized, has managed to keep its Syriac poetic and demonstrative⁷² heritage and recovered even more of it after the Lebanese Synod of 2006. The Antiochian Orthodox Church, besides its Byzantine heritage, prides itself with an Antiochian spirituality demonstrated in its highly dramatic and mysterious Liturgy.⁷³

Once married the women undertake a personal move from a mother church into a hosting church where one does not totally abandon the old nor officially convert into the new. The two (or more⁷⁴) traditions remain present in the life of the women, but through the movement between the structures and traditions they fashion a new conception of liturgical existence where the structures prove to be not as solid and separate as one thinks. The Maronite-Protestant or Antiochian Orthodox-Protestant displacement is a move between two liturgically different poles. A choice for either the one or the other seems to be inevitable in this context both formally – on the level of ecclesial membership and citizenship-identity status – and practically – with regard to the details of the Christian faith and liturgical practice. Free movements between and within institutions can be seen by the institutions, as Mike Baynham would put it, as ‘threatening the stable borders of national identities’⁷⁵ or in this case ecclesial identities.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, from the position of the women the borders are more porous and flexible and what looks like a geographic map is not a map. The territorial rigid understanding of denomination is transformed by the women into a flowing open space where new things are possible. Instead of visualizing a

⁷⁰ George Sabra, *Fi Sabeel el Hiwar el Maskouni, Maqalat Lahoutiya Injiliya* (Towards the Ecumenical Dialogue: Evangelical Theological Essays) (Beirut: Clarion Publishing House, 2001); Wanees Semaan, *Aliens at Home. A Socio-Religious Analysis of the Protestant Church in Lebanon and Its Backgrounds* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1986).

⁷¹ Rima Nasrallah, *The Liturgies in the Antiochian Orthodox and Maronite Churches and their Implications on the Liturgy in the Reformed Church in Lebanon* (Master’s Thesis, VU University, Amsterdam, 2009).

⁷² A term used by Fr. I.H. Dalmis to characterize the religious devotion in the Antiochian Tradition in Baby Varghese, *West Syrian Liturgical Theology* (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), p.7.

⁷³ Ignatius IV, Patriarch of Antioch and all The East, *Orthodoxy and Other Issues of our Time*, trans. from Arabic by Shaun O’ Sullivan (Balamand: University of Balamand, 2006).

⁷⁴ Many women considered come themselves originally from families where the parents are from different liturgical traditions, Maronite- Antiochian Orthodox, Maronite-Catholic, Antiochian Orthodox- Syriac Orthodox etc.

⁷⁵ Mike Baynham and Anna de Fina (eds.), *Dislocation/Relocation: Narratives of Displacement* (Saint Jerome Publishing, Manchester, 2005), p.2. Or seen as polluting in the sense of Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966).

⁷⁶ Based on interviews with church leaders (pastors and priests).

territorial religious map we shall then look at the liturgical lives of these women in the context of Fluid *Scapes*.

These liturgical lives were investigated with the help of ethnographic methods. Since 2009 participant observation at several intervals was conducted in four Protestant churches in different areas in Lebanon. Twelve women were selected from the target group for in-depth interviews, and twelve others were asked to write a short spiritual biography. In a second phase, having realized the prevalence of mobility in the target group, the women in question were accompanied by the researcher to their many other places of worship, monasteries, mother churches, homes etc. This exercise substantiated the complexity of the movements and therefore of the kind of liturgical lives led by the women. Henceforth, some of the women were asked to videotape moments, places, and practices that they identify as liturgically significant and then comment on them.⁷⁷ The empirical data solicited a cross-methodological analysis where movement and fluidity emerged as one of the consequential themes.

III. FLUID LITURGICAL SCAPES

In this part we will describe how this movement between the liturgical traditions results in fluid scapes and appeals for a particular language around it. Summarizing prevailing trends in the study of religion in motion, Manuel Vázquez presents three sets of metaphors currently in use.⁷⁸ The first is a set of spatial metaphors, the second hydraulic metaphors, and the third is an array of connectivity metaphors. While spatial metaphors of landscapes and cartographies maintain the locality, embodiment and contextual aspects of religious practices, used on their own, they might convey a rather segregated and static effect. Hydraulic metaphors of flows and currents, promoted by Appadurai, used in combination with spatial metaphors account for the irregularity, flexibility and globality of religion in movement. While Vázquez himself opts for metaphors of connectivity such as *Networks* to account for the “crisscrossing relations of power”,⁷⁹ we chose the spatial-hydraulic compound expressed by Appadurai in the notion of *scapes*.⁸⁰ The metaphor of network

⁷⁷ The body of taped and transcribed interviews, biographies, observations and videos are stored in the Protestant Theological University, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, according to Dutch Law.

⁷⁸ Vázquez, ‘Studying Religion in Motion’ p.165.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p.168.

⁸⁰ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*.

assumes a certain connectivity between the people and events observed. In the case of this research, observation has shown no connectivity but rather very individualized and personal movements. It is therefore Appadurai's *scapes*, adapted to religion in Tweed's 'sacroscares' that will cover the liturgical confluences in the crossing and moving of the women in question. Furthermore the choice for *scapes* is mindful of Appadurai and Tweed's use of the term in including both the real and the imaginary and the different movements between them.

This suffix, usually part of a compound, is used here on its own in an attempt to e-scape trapping this 'sphere of life'⁸¹ in cartographic language. Not that the liturgical lives of the women do not unfold in geographical places and traditional territories, or in Vázquez's words are 'anchored' and 'grounded',⁸² but that place and space acquire new meanings and arrangements that a cartographic imagery alone wouldn't be able to capture. These liturgical *scapes* are spheres of life where people, ideas, objects, and practices are in continuous motion but whose 'paths or vectors' in Appadurai's words 'have different speeds, axes, points of origin and termination, and varied relationships to institutional structures'.⁸³ They flow and move freely around obstacles. They are shapeless and keep changing while adapting to their containers. In their fluidity one cannot pin them down but rather take a 'snapshot', as Bauman says, of their flow at that particular instant. What these women describe in the interviews and biographies and what the researcher notes is a snapshot of the state of these liturgical lives at that particular time when the observation was done. Discussions following up the interviews a couple of years later show that many positions described before have slightly changed and items of priority were rearranged.

⁸¹ Paula Saukko, *Doing Research in Cultural Studies: An Introduction to classical and New methodological Approaches*, (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003) p.177.

⁸² Manuel A. Vázquez and Marie Friedmann Marquardt, *Globalizing the Sacred* p. 3.

⁸³ Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *Globalization*, p.6.

Snapshots

The examples of Najat, Nada and Leena⁸⁴ will help in discussing the characteristics and formations of these *scapes*.

- a. Najat comes from a town in the far South of Lebanon. She was born and raised in a Greek Orthodox family and got married to a Presbyterian man. From the South of Lebanon to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and back into the Mount Lebanon area, Najat carried with her an ever developing and changing liturgical life. Today, a 65 year old widow living on her own, Najat participates every Wednesday in the holy liturgy at the Orthodox Church next door. On Sundays she attends at the Presbyterian Church, 'the church of my children' as she calls it. During the day, Najat watches an Evangelical satellite channel starring a charismatic female preacher. Her TV stands in her kitchen where she has created an altar housed in an old fish aquarium and illuminated by a red candle. In her aquarium she exhibits icons, pictures, incense bags, rocks, leaves and other religious artifacts from the many monasteries and sites she visits. Periodically, she goes on short vacations to pilgrimage site, the latest was to Saint Catherine's Monastery in Egypt. 'This is right and that is right', says Najat when referring to the two traditions she holds to. In the Orthodox Church, she feels an intense spirituality experienced in the rituals. 'I feel the Holy Spirit in the Orthodox Church when the priest is breaking the bread and the wine, I feel it is more powerful; (...) and there too in the Protestant Church, it is you, your own presence that changes the bread and the wine to a reality of body and blood, there it is you!'. Both are appreciated and not the least opposed. However, would this make her both Protestant and Orthodox? 'No No No' she answers 'when I was a child I did not have this faith yet it was there as a seed, but it needed to be awakened and to grow. The King of Glory He is the one who made it strong. Today I do not care what others say. I have my strong personality and I do not care neither what my siblings nor what my children say, I set my own priorities and do what I want, for example, I do worship the Virgin Mary (...) peace be upon her name'.

⁸⁴ These and other examples are described in depth in Rima Nasrallah, *Women Between Liturgical Traditions The Liturgical lives of the Lebanese Maronite and Antiochian Orthodox Women Married to Protestant Men* (Master's Thesis, VU University Amsterdam, 2010).

- b. Nada also grew up in an Orthodox family in the Bekaa area. It is her grandmother who took her to Church, taught her the chants and involved her in the colorful preparations of the feasts. During her University years in Beirut she met her husband, a Congregationalist Reformed Protestant, and together they settled in the capital. Though her husband himself does not attend church very often, she has come to love and appreciate the Protestant Church and faith. Alone or in the company of her father in law she comes as often as she can to ‘actively engage (her) mind and do some reflection’ as she listens to the sermons of the learned pastors of the Protestant Church. In order to create a spiritual ‘balance’, as she calls it, she tries to attend in both the Orthodox Church and the Protestant Church at a ratio of one to ten respectively. ‘We need a balance’ she explained, ‘this is tiring brain-wise and spiritually because in our church(Protestant) you have to be very very very involved, and this one (the Orthodox) is magnetic, hypnotic, relaxing; there you relax and wait for God to do something to you’. ‘I appreciate both’, adds Nada, ‘I feel both are needed and I feel that each side has its strength’. During feast days Nada has to rely on her memory and recall the richness of her childhood feasting days. As she attends the services of Holy Week in the Protestant Church and Saturday of the light in the Orthodox Church, it is her memories of a long season of fasting and feasting that connects the days together. Her memories of the past are continuously fed by the regular visits she still makes to the many monasteries in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan irrespective of their denomination. From all these places Nada brings back oil, incense or bread to share with her family; even from the Protestant Church she likes to take more than one piece of bread during the Lord’s Supper to share later with those absent. Nada expresses her frustration about lacking an adequate vocabulary to express her faith. She admires those in the Protestant Church who can talk so eloquently on the pulpit or write so beautifully in the church publications about faith, and she is intimidated by that. In order to find her own words of faith, she looks on the walls of pilgrimage sanctuaries where people scribble prayers and thoughts related to their struggles in life.
- c. Born and raised an Orthodox, Leena got married and some years later got divorced from a Protestant man. When she is in the city where she now lives, she faithfully attends at the Protestant Church and actively participates in the women’s meetings.

When she goes to her village in the North she participates in the liturgies and celebrations at a special monastery for Orthodox nuns. She says that she is 'Protestant in the city and Orthodox in the village' and feels equally comfortable in both churches. Her liturgical year is designed around her movement between these two places. Or maybe vice versa. Easter time, for example, is spent in the village. Though it starts in the Protestant Church in Beirut it climaxes in the village monastery where she spends more than 26 hours in prayer, processions, chanting and enactment of the dramatic events. However, her selection of feasts and their performance is very particular. Though she has dropped all Marial feasts and days of saints she maintains feasts related to the life of Jesus. Epiphany, Easter time, Transfiguration and the Feast of the Cross are celebrated with the Orthodox. Christmas, parts of Easter time, Pentecost and Ascension with the Protestant. 'I am very content with the fact that not all denominations celebrate Easter on the same day, so I can celebrate with both!', she says. In the Protestant church, she does not pray with words as the Protestants do; instead, as she writes in her biography, 'I go through a visual panorama in my mind of all I am going through in my life, and everyone and everything I want to pray for, and hope God can read my thoughts!'.

IV. DECONSTRUCTIVE FORMATIONS

Avoiding or resisting the concept of 'conversion' as understood in the Protestant Church, these women perform their liturgical lives across at least three spaces: the mother church with its associated institutions, the Protestant Church and the private home space. Within this construction, the women refuse the either-or situation, where they are implicitly expected to choose only one of the liturgical styles. The resistance to an 'either-or' is not only towards ecclesial structures but mostly towards binary understandings and oppositions of the two (or more) liturgical worlds in the midst of which the women find themselves. In their behavior and their speech, the women refuse to evaluate one side as right and the other as wrong, or to order them hierarchically. Binary oppositions such as Eastern/Western, high/low, elaborate/simple, cognitive/affective, analytical/ demonstrative, propitiation/ sanctification, seeing/ hearing, being/doing that seem very obvious to a researcher, are not treated by the women in opposition. While still noted by the women, they treat these in combination to help them move forward to yet another experience where

again they recombine elements and move once more. Through this action they keep deferring meaning.

The differentiation between the two churches is a subject introduced by the interviewer during the empirical research. The women themselves did not seem to segregate the two liturgical worlds as much. On the contrary, there appeared to be blurring the borders between the liturgical worlds.⁸⁵ When talking about their spiritual life the women tended to mix the deictic languages pertaining to the various traditions. When talking about their mother church it is sometimes 'us' and sometimes 'them'. The 'here', 'there', 'now', 'then', 'mine', 'yours' etc. do not always refer to the same entity. The separation between mother church and Protestant Church that seems clear for an onlooker appears to be elusive in the course of the interview. The interviewer had to constantly ask the question 'which church?', when the women were describing what they feel, do and think in 'church'.

Related to this fluidity of borders and near absence of differentiation, is a process of redefinition of liturgical space. The liturgical spaces hosting the women's lives are flexible and elastic.⁸⁶ Najat goes to her mother church on Wednesday and to the Protestant Church on Sunday, while Nada alternates depending on her mood, and others alternate between feast days and normal days and even between village and city life. Though these are movements between geographical spaces, they do not always follow strict patterns or order. In addition to the traditional liturgical spaces, the women add the house, such as Najat's kitchen, the car, the monasteries, and office space. It is in her office that Nada, for example, spends most of her praying time.

Though the women start with a movement between Orthodox and Protestant liturgical spaces, they soon open up to other traditions. Najat has in recent years made contacts with the Coptic Church whose pilgrimage sites she visited and whose faithful she joined in a virtual church online as a PalTalk worship 'room'. One of Nada's regular places is a Catholic church dedicated to Saint Rita, whose life story has been an inspiration to her. In addition to physical spaces, imaginary and virtual spaces add to the elasticity of the scape.

⁸⁵ Similar to what is described by Henk Driessen (2009), 'Local Religion Revisited: Mediterranean Cases'.

⁸⁶ Which is in line with Susan J. White's description of "The Places of Women's Worship" in *A History of Women in Christian Worship* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim, 2003) 39-80.

In a Protestant setting, Nada lights a candle ‘mentally’ as there are no physical candles to light; on Holy Friday she visits ‘in her memory’ the fields in her village where she previously picked flowers to place on the coffin of Jesus. In times of trouble, she visually recreates a trip she made to Lake Tiberius. For Leena as well, a visual panorama is her space of prayer. Belonging to these multiple traditions, the women have to stretch their spaces of worship to fill gaps and create continuity.

This fluidity does not only affect space but also reorganizes time. Each woman develops her own liturgical calendar and understanding of time. Not one of the twenty four women interviewed follows the liturgical calendar of any one of the traditions. On the contrary, each ascribes new meanings to time, to the days of the week, and to the seasons of the liturgical year. Some select and observe specific days of the week such as Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays or Sundays, by cooking certain foods or attending mass or liturgy, or censing the house. Others drop the observance of days altogether, worshipping erratically, while others look for meanings or ways to mark the liturgical dimension of the week. Not only the days of the week, but also the liturgical seasons and feasts are fashioned according to the new convictions and likings. For example, lent can be between 40 and 60 days depending on whether one wants to celebrate with one tradition or with both. It can start on either Monday or Wednesday and it can include Sundays or not. Leena starts fasting with the Protestants but the ‘real’ feast is always with the Orthodox. Nada does not fast at all: ‘fasting is a state of mind she says’, ‘I fast in my heart’. A woman could drop all Marial feasts, like Leena, or choose only one of them, like Nada chose the feast of our Lady of Saydnaya, the patron Saint of her village. Some decide on Saint Elijah, but not Saint George; Epiphany with the Orthodox, but Easter with the Protestants, and so on. They fashion thus a liturgical year of their own, completely unique, and in much of the time according to a distinctive and private inherent theological logic and conviction. Things become even more fluid and difficult to describe when we realize that these arrangements change from year to year and that women interviewed again after a certain period have changed their minds about certain times and their meanings.

This change in mind is connected to the particularly dynamic liturgical theology these women have. Moving in between traditions does not only liquefy their convictions but sets them in motion. As they move around, theological concepts are revisited and reinterpreted

in light of ‘other’ concepts and practices. There seems to be a continuous evaluation of the Mass, the Eucharist, salvation by faith alone, intercession of Saints, priesthood of all believers, the work of the Holy Spirit, the function of icons, and, of course, the place and role of the Virgin Mary. All of this is continuously arranged and rearranged, mixed and transformed. The function of the liturgy as described by the women can be both to sanctify (as experienced in the Orthodox Church) and to educate (in the Protestant); it can be both an ‘offering by the humans’ (done in the Maronite) and ‘call of God’ (listened to in the Reformed). A focus on Christology and the humanity of Christ and thus an anthropological starting point (Maronite), can be combined with an emphasis on the transcendence of God (Reformed). A certain tension is sometimes expressed between the power –and limits– of the Word and words in the Reformed context and the mysterious and undefined work of the Spirit as allowed by Orthodox theology.

In this theological brew, the sacraments get stretched to accommodate the dynamic situation. Baptism could be multiple, performed anywhere and for various functions, such as remission of sins, fulfilling a pledge or declaration of faith⁸⁷. The understanding and the practice of Holy Communion is even more complex. Though officially, there is no intercommunion between Orthodox and Protestants, the women in question commune everywhere. In some cases the Orthodox Eucharist is treated with a Protestant understanding. In others, the bread in the Protestant Lord’s Supper is treated as Orthodox *Antidoron* rather than *Prosphora*, and considered of a ‘lesser sanctity’ and taken home to be shared. However, a clear theology about the Eucharist does not seem to be pressing; it is rather its frequency that is problematic. Most women interviewed expressed their dissatisfaction with the once-a-month communion in the Protestant Church. Other issues related to the sacraments are also personally elaborated. Building on the two sacraments of the Reformed Church, they creatively add and redefine as many as their faith, family circumstances and tradition requires.

The fluidity expresses itself both in private daily practices and official public performances. Najat regularly uses incense in her home; the incense is brought from Orthodox monasteries, but as she walks with her copper sensor she hums the Arabic version of the

⁸⁷ Rima Nasrallah, Heleen Murre-van den Berg, Marcel Barnard, ‘Kinetics of Healing: Protestant Women Pledging Baptism in Saydnaya Orthodox Monastery’, in *Studia Liturgica* (42).

Protestant Hymn ‘Bless the Lord oh My Soul’. Liturgical music, iconography, liturgical foods and hagiography combine to make these liturgical lives a workshop of artistic bricolage.⁸⁸

All this offers but a glimpse into the complexity of the fluid scapes of these liturgical lives. This creativity is continuous and it develops throughout the lives of the women, not in a linear way but mostly in an iterative way where the concepts and practices are continuously revisited and reshaped.

V. CRITICAL POSITIONING: A FLUID- SOLID CLEFT

We have explained so far how the physical movement of these women impels them and propels them to perform fluid liturgical lives. We have described the fluid liturgical scapes. We will now reflect on what all this fluidity and dynamism mean, particularly in the context of structures grappling with modern assumptions and hopes of purity, segregation and borders.

Though it might have appeared so in the descriptions above, the particularities of these lives are not noticeable to a random observer. They are neither group movements nor public manifestations. On the contrary, they are quite personal, private, unique and discrete. They are what Michel de Certeau describes, as ‘maneuvers accomplished in the dark (...) that seize opportunity to (...) cross borders’⁸⁹. The mother churches and the Protestant churches look disapprovingly at these liquid liturgical lives. The mother church sees the women almost as apostates. The Protestant Church sees them as ‘students’ to be taught and reformed. The husbands are either burdened or embarrassed by their practices. And the Christian society does not know where to place them.

Here’s Looking at You

Discomfort with irregularity, fluidity and non-conformity, especially in what concerns women’s spiritual life, should not surprise. In a recent Article, Willy Jansen describes the unusual life decisions of three particular Middle Eastern religious women in the 18th and 19th century. She draws our attention to the way the institutions dealt with those

⁸⁸ A term used by Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jacques Derrida and applied by Marcel Barnard to Liturgical practices. See Marcel Barnard, Johan Cilliers, Cas Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, chapter 6. See also Ulf Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

⁸⁹ Graham Ward (ed.), *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader* (Blackwell Readings in Modern Theology), (Massachusetts: Blackwell publishers, 1997) p.137.

‘deviations’ either by condemning them and sending them far away from the community as was the case with Umm Hindiyya, or by turning their ‘folly’ into sanctity and making it into an exception, as in the case of Saint Rafqa, supporting the purpose of the institutional church. Jansen reminds us how the Jesuits ‘loathed the diversity of Christian sects and religions in Aleppo and the rest of the Ottoman Empire’⁹⁰, and were aggravated by the ‘heresy’ of its people. Though Jansen is mostly interested to highlight the agency and strong will of the women described whom she calls ‘spokes women to larger movements’, she mentions as well the ‘ambiguity in their lives, the constant going back and forth between what is acceptable and what (...) was not’.⁹¹

Just like their sisters who struggled to find a place, – however uncomfortable, – in the Maronite religious orders at that time, women who got in touch with the early Protestant missionaries in the 19th century were also considered with critical eyes.⁹² When describing what she calls the ‘Protestant Circle’ in the 19th century Christine Lindner explains how ‘Syrian’ or native women’s spirituality and liturgical practices were also viewed suspiciously by the Anglo-American missionaries. Referring to those women who joined the Protestant circle by marriage or by employment she explains that ‘it appears that many of the normative characteristics for Protestantism that were articulated by the Protestant elite were more difficult for these women to embody and as a result, they were often relegated to marginal positions within the circle’.⁹³

Though these observations concern the views and positions towards liturgical lives of some women in the 19th century, they still hold true to a certain degree today. The Jesuits’ concern for purity as well as the Protestant resentment of all ‘non-Protestant’ practices and beliefs are ingrained in the heirs of the missionaries, the churches of today of all three traditions considered in this research. Orthodox priests who heard of this research could only think of two possibilities for these women, either they are still ‘real’ Orthodox believers whose bodies have to sit occasionally on Protestant pews, or dissidents who have left the

⁹⁰ Jansen, ‘Demanding a Religious Place’, p.318.

⁹¹ Jansen, ‘Demanding a Religious Place’, p.322.

⁹² Heleen Murre-van den Berg, ‘Nineteenth-century Protestant Missions and Middle Eastern Women: An Overview’ in Inger Marie Okkenhaug and Ingvild Flakerud (eds.), *Gender, Religion and Change in the Middle East: Two Hundred Years of History* (Oxford/New York: Berg 2005), 103–122.

⁹³ Lindner, *Negotiating the Field*, p.114.

‘church’. Protestant pastors and ardent faithful saw in the research a good way to identify ‘defective’ congregation members in need of reform and highlight practices for correction. When joining one Maronite-Protestant family for the celebration of the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in a Maronite Church (August 2012), I was told to be careful not to attract attention to the Protestant spirit we have hanging about us.

As if holding a ‘looking-glass’,⁹⁴ these women create discomfort as they remind the institutional structures that their claims of a possible purity of faith and absolute truth are shaky. By flowing between the structures, in and out of traditions and by creating their own self-made labile liturgical lives they take the reins of power, even if for many onlookers they seem disoriented. This fluidity and blurriness confuses liturgical authorities who tend to resort to the rhetoric’s of the 19th century and borrow from the Western missionaries discourses on right and wrong in order to ‘correct’ or limit this ‘folly’. However, as said earlier these practices are not done, seen or heard at the heart of either traditions but rather in the ‘margins’ remaining unseen and unheard.

Humoring

Using their position as ex-centric/eccentrics, i.e, both not being at the ‘center’ of either one of the traditions and displaying unusual liturgical lives, these women look at what is usual and discover the unusual in it.⁹⁵ What is underlined by the ecclesial traditions as liturgically essential becomes contingent and unnecessary. Bound by love and faithfulness yet detached by motion, the fluidity of the liturgical lives of these women make of them affectionate critics of all liturgical practices and theologies. Their critical position becomes evident in three ways: first, by merely being present in their fluid way, second, by actively yet sometimes naively pointing to certain practices and beliefs, and third, by adopting a kind of satirical attitude.

Merely by being there and forming their own private liturgical life, they expose by contrast the rigidity of traditional liturgical practices. In this context, ritual can be relativized and its

⁹⁴ A term Zijderfeld uses to describe modern rational structures confronted with the folly of those deviating from the norm, in Anton C. Zijderfeld, *Reality in a Looking-Glass: Rationality Through an Analysis of Traditional Folly* (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982).

⁹⁵ One of the ways in which Jacques Derrida explains deconstruction in Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering, *Derrida*, (USA: Joe Doe Films, 2002).

function and form continuously questioned. These alternative practices break the capsule of solid practices in liturgical traditions and liquefies the essential into contingent. The presence of these women reminds liturgists that 'it can be otherwise'. By being present, neither as antagonists nor as advocates but rather reconciling many irreconcilable matters, they position the 'pure' others in an impossible stance. It becomes difficult for the 'others' to classify them; for both parties they are neither simply outsiders who know nothing, nor insiders who should know better.

In addition, by using their status as insiders-outsiders to the traditions they can be critical in a second more obvious and direct way: by simply pointing to the usual and exposing it as unusual. Being not very familiar with the emotional and historical accumulations of the Protestant Church, for example, they dare ask big questions about sensitive issues: 'Why don't we celebrate communion every week?'; 'Why are you afraid to mention the Virgin Mary?'; 'What's wrong with crossing oneself?'; 'So why do we fast?'; 'why don't we have the bread and the wine at the same time?'. Similarly, they pose questions to their mother church, questions about the emergence of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, about the necessity of repetitive prayer, about confession to a priest, etc. In addition by clearly selecting things to cherish from their own tradition and others to reinterpret, they break open what is considered as one package and challenge liturgical authority.

Far from being weak and hiding heretics, the women adopt a rather satirical attitude. Using the common perception of women as 'religiously naïve', they can question without offending or provoking. Interestingly, many of the women interviewed admitted to both seriousness and playfulness towards liturgical ecclesial authorities. In retelling the episode where she requested her certificate of non-impediment from her village priest, Nana told:

'the priest told me, "Couldn't you find other than a Protestant man to marry?!"; so I saw how naïve the old priest was so I humored him. "No one else asked for my hand in marriage, do you then want me to stay a spinster? To remain here in front of you an old spinster!", I told him. So he grew silent. I was laughing at him, humoring him. So he shut up.' (Nana, December 2009).

Many things are described as ridiculous by the women when they try to evaluate practices and beliefs on either side. The protestant refusal to do things lest they become 'like the

Catholics' as well as the Maronites' and Orthodox' attachment to practices considered obsolete by the women. 'A young boy has to carry the Bible so that the priest reads it, aren't there lecterns for this?', exclaimed one of the ladies. 'The priest goes into one door and out of another, and then again into one and out of the other, aren't we entitled to know what is happening behind those doors?', said Anna. 'I come 15 minutes late in the Wednesday evening liturgy (in the Orthodox Church), in the beginning it's a bit of a filler of time with many repetitions, a bit meaningless', explained Fida. But still, they are ready to 'play' along, to participate even if they do not completely agree. The church, the clergy and the traditions are at the same time both respected and ragged. 'This is perhaps where I stand today – as a rebel', explained Stephanie when describing her liturgical life. Though she too participates here and there with what is done publically, she rebels both against excessive ritualizing and boring sermons. Admitting that not all women consider themselves rebels, they still cannot miss seeing and pointing to the many aspects of rigidity of the practices.

However, being in such a position does not mean that they are detached or unaffected by the liturgical traditions and groups that surround them. On the contrary, they are engaged and serious about their faith. Yet, it is between and across those institutional liturgical traditions rather than within them that these women find meaning.⁹⁶

VI. CONCLUSION

In this article the focus was on Orthodox and Maronite women married to Protestant men with the elaborate cases being Orthodox. These are by no means the only kinds of fluid liturgical lives in Lebanon and by extension in the Middle East.⁹⁷ In a region where the Christian community is a minority, and the Christian denominations varied, intermarriages, religious schools and mixed neighborhoods set the liturgical practices and identities in motion.

These fluid liturgical lives are considered 'irregular' by ecclesial authorities and remain quite invisible to mainline academic research which both relies on texts and documents and looks more at structures than practices. However, the fact remains that Middle Eastern Christians in general, and the women among them in particular, lead flexible religious lives

⁹⁶ Echoing Jay L. Lemke 'Identity, Development and Desire: Critical Questions' in Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard and Rick Iedema (ed.), *Identity Trouble: Critical Discourse and contested identities* (UK and USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.39.

⁹⁷ Or even the Mediterranean area at large, see Driessen, 'Local Religion Revisited'.

that are close to what Heyberger calls “oecumenisme sauvage” et spontané’.⁹⁸ These lives deserve to be studied in the many confluences that flow into them and shape them just as much as the official formulations of ecclesial structures. The challenge that faces such attempts is the nature of the field and the fact that these realities are lived in ‘Fluid Scapes’, invisible and difficult to trap, pin down and delineate. This lived form of religion is elusive and confusing and clashes often with prescribed religion. Hence a choice for texts and documents seems a more certain alley for researchers. Yet, in order to be fair to the complex religious realities, it is necessary to look between the established traditions at the messy areas of the field and its various layers.

⁹⁸ Bernard Heyberger, *Chrétiens du Monde Arabe*, p.11.



The Embroidered Shroud

Photo: Zeenalee Ayub

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Chapter 3: Itinerant Feasting

Eastern Christian Women Negotiating (physical) Presence in the Celebration of Easter

I. INTRODUCTION

It has become a convention for Protestant Churches in Lebanon – and particularly in the area of Beirut – to gather several congregations on Good Friday to worship together in one Church. Although this has a fellowship and unity aspect to it, there are other reasons why these churches find the need to come together on that particular day in the liturgical year. The truth is that attendance fluctuates dramatically during Holy Week in the individual churches. Though three to four congregations join to worship together on Good Friday, the numbers hardly fill one church. However, as they separate to celebrate the resurrection on Sunday morning their churches are overflowing and hardly able to contain the faithful. Those congregation members who would not show up on Friday were most likely celebrating in another non-Protestant Church.

This article looks at this phenomenon in depth and suggests ways of looking at the performance of liturgy and its theological appropriation in the lives of those people who choose to celebrate in various Christian traditions during the same liturgical season. While the starting point here is the Easter season and more specifically Holy Week, this study aims to elucidate the more general liturgical theology lying in this practice. The particular persons we choose to consider in this movement are Lebanese women who come originally from Antiochian Orthodox Churches⁹⁹ and who by marriage join the Protestant Reformed Church of their husbands. Frequently moving between their mother church and the Protestant church, these women, who constitute the vast majority of the marriages in the

⁹⁹ Also known as the Greek Orthodox or the Rūm tradition. See *Tareekh Kanissat Antaqia lil Rūm el Orthodox. Ayyat Khoṣoṣiya?* (*The History of the Rūmī Antiochian Orthodox Church. What Specificity?*), Bouar. Balamand Publications 1999.

small and relatively young Lebanese Reformed church, form unique and intriguing liturgical practices and theologies.¹⁰⁰

Focusing on the celebration of Easter in particular, was a choice imposed by the ethnographic findings.¹⁰¹ All the women considered –without exception– set apart the Easter season as the epitome of their Liturgical life. Easter,¹⁰² in its liturgical performance, functions as a meaning giver to all their religious/spiritual activities and in particular to the way they experience the presence or absence of the divine. Starting from the particular context of each of the liturgical celebrations, we focus on the bodily experience of the women and derive the sacramental theology as practiced.¹⁰³ We will therefore begin by analyzing the bodily experience of the liturgy relying mostly on theories developed by Thomas Tweed (part 2). We will then move on to explain what this means for the general liturgical orientation of the women and its implication for their perception of the presence and absence of Christ (part 3). Finally, relying on Louis-Marie Chauvet's approach and in dialog with it, we will attempt to derive the lived sacramental theology (part 4) of the

¹⁰⁰ See R. Nasrallah, H. Murre-van den Berg, M. Barnard, 'Kinetics of Healing: Protestant Women Pledging Baptism in Saydnaya Orthodox Monastery', *Studia Liturgica*, 42, (2012). And R. Nasrallah, M. Barnard, 'Taking Liberties The fluid liturgical lives of Orthodox and Maronite women within the Protestant Church in Lebanon', *Journal For Eastern Christian Studies*, upcoming.

¹⁰¹ This article is based on an empirical study. The field was studied through in-depth interviews and spiritual biographies of 20 women; participant observation over extended periods of time; videos and photo analysis; and an intimate knowledge of the field. The women considered come from Antiochian Orthodox Churches but also Maronite Churches and join the Protestant Church by marriage. For this particular article we focus more on the Antiochian Orthodox women.

¹⁰² In accordance with Paul Post's definition: "a feast is not viewed merely as a ritual offering, or designated by ecclesiastical guidelines and instructions, but primarily as a bearer of meaning in the process of interpretation and conferring significance, through which groups or individuals experience and flesh out for themselves a liturgical repertoire handed down to them." In P. Post, G. Rauwhorst, L. Van Tongeren and A. Scheer (eds.), *Christian Feasts and Festivals: The Dynamics of Western Liturgy and Culture*, Liturgia Condenda 12, Leuven: Peeters 2001, 60.

¹⁰³ We embrace here an approach to liturgical studies that values the lived and the particular, see M. Barnard, J. Cilliers, C. Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture: Liturgical Ritual Studies – Fields and Methods, Concepts and Metaphors*, Liturgia Condenda, Leuven: Peeters, *upcoming*. By looking at the practiced theology we hope to enrich the ecumenical discussions which "consist almost entirely of exegetical and historical expositions" and we strive to highlight "the relevance of the sacrament in our present-day culture... in its concrete situation", see M. E. Brinkman, *Sacraments of Freedom: Ecumenical Essays on Creation and Sacrament-Justification and Freedom*, Zoetermeer: Meinema 1999, 88.

women from these practices. By this we embrace the ‘contemporary approach to liturgical theology’ that begins ‘with the ritual event in order to discover theological meaning’.¹⁰⁴

II. BODIES AND THE BODY

Starting with ‘bodies’ we align ourselves with recent philosophical and liturgical developments¹⁰⁵ in many disciplines that consider the body as the seat of the deepest experience, or what Foucault calls ‘the zero point of experience’, ‘the place in our own coordinate system where our experiences intersect’.¹⁰⁶ Together with theologians such as Louis-Marie Chauvet and Gerardus van der Leeuw we affirm that we do not simply have bodies but *are* bodies.¹⁰⁷ Hence, following religious scholar Thomas Tweed’s understanding that ‘religion begins– and ends – with bodies’,¹⁰⁸ we begin by paying special attention to the way the women use and experience their bodies in each of the liturgical celebrations to orient and position themselves. In this approach we regard bodies as being confluences of organic, cultural and traditional entities. These bodies which are not to be considered as instruments are where ‘*the truest things in our faith occur*’.¹⁰⁹ We will therefore start by first (2.A) locating these bodies in their context and then move on to look at how the biological, cultural and traditional shape and position the bodies in space (2.B) and in time (2.C).

Our attempt to understand the bodiliness of the liturgical celebrations of the women considered, admits its limits in that ‘the body is the most intimate of experiences, the most

¹⁰⁴ Judith M. Kubicki, ‘Perception, Presence, and Sacramentality in a Postmodern Context’, *Studia Liturgica* 35 (2005), 230.

¹⁰⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Mary Douglas, David Brown, Gerard Lukken, Gerardus van der Leeuw, Thomas Tweed, Louis-Marie Chauvet, among others.

¹⁰⁶ R. Ammicht-Quinn, ‘Cult, Culture and Ambivalence: Images and Imaginations of the Body in Christian Traditions and Contemporary Lifestyles’, in *Fluid Flesh: The Body, Religion and The Visual Arts*, ed., B. Baert, Leuven: Leuven University Press 2009, 71.

¹⁰⁷ A notion not altogether new, Tertullian for example believed that “the most sublime intellectual operations take place ‘in the flesh, with the flesh and through the flesh’” see A. G. Cooper, *Life in the Flesh: An Anti-Gnostic Spiritual Philosophy*, Oxford Scholarship online, January (2009), 66.

¹⁰⁸ T. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 2008, 98.

¹⁰⁹ L.M. Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, Trans. By P. Madigan and M. Beaumont, Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press 1995, 140.

elusive of verbal naming, description, conventions'¹¹⁰ and represents more than what can be conveyed through words. The interest here is far from the Western contemporary culture of obsession with the body,¹¹¹ but rather focuses on situated and lived bodies, bodies that bear histories and express desires.

In the study of Easter another Body comes into discussion; One that defies all definitions of bodies and logic. The body of Christ which is the main player of the narrative is a body that confuses in contradiction between suffering and glory, limitedness and infinity, humanity and divinity, death and life and finally its presence and absence. And yet in the celebrations of Easter it is in the dynamics with this Body that theologies are formed.

Location. Emptiness and Thickness

The celebration of Holy Week is marked by excessive involvement, movement and even collision of bodies. The very first impression one has from the observation of the field is the continuous movement of (the bodies of) the women from one church to the other. Field data showed that the celebration of Easter in particular and in an exaggerated way zigzags between the mother church and the Protestant Church in almost all the cases considered. While most women attend rather faithfully the Sunday worship services during the lent season¹¹² in the Protestant Church, they choose to participate in the liturgies of their mother church during Holy Week, in order to return back to the Protestant Church on the Sunday of the resurrection.¹¹³ These women who emphasized their appreciation and esteem for both traditions, explained this practice by clarifying that “there is “nothing” in the Protestant

¹¹⁰ E. Scarry, quoted in L. Palmer Wandel, *The Eucharist in the Reformation: Incarnation and Liturgy*, New York: Cambridge University Press 2006, 7.

¹¹¹ See D. Brown, *God and the Grace of Bodies: Sacrament in Ordinary*, Oxford Scholarship online 2008; and J. Cilliers, ‘Fides Quaerens Corporalitem: Perspectives on Liturgical Embodiment’, *Verbum et Ecclesia* 30/1 (2009), 50–64.

¹¹² We should keep in mind here that the women considered are regular church goers at the Protestant Church.

¹¹³ The Protestant Church follows the Gregorian Liturgical Calendar while the Antiochian Orthodox Church the Julian one, therefore the celebrations of the feast rarely coincide. Nevertheless, the pattern of choosing Good Friday and Saturday of the light in the Orthodox Church and resurrection Sunday in the Protestant Church (or other combination of days) even if separated by weeks is the common practice.

Church during Holy Week’;¹¹⁴ this perception of ‘nothing’ might be the key for us to start understanding and analyzing what in fact is happening during this feast for these women.

In reality, Protestant Churches in Lebanon vary in their liturgical schedule for Holy Week. Traditionally and as inherited from the Anglo-American missionaries of the nineteenth and early twentieth century,¹¹⁵ the churches had very few services – if ever-- between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday. Nevertheless, with time, many churches¹¹⁶ especially in the area of greater Beirut started marking more days with special worship services (such as Maundy Thursday and Good Friday). Nonetheless, for the women in question there is ‘nothing’ in the Protestant Church during Holy Week.

This emptiness that they experience refers to a certain spatial perception which though at first disorienting comes to be appreciated with time. Nonetheless, from their first encounter with the Protestant Church the women are struck with the emptiness of the building and the context of the liturgy. As one of the women explained.

Let me tell you, when I first came into the Protestant Church I did not feel I was coming in a church. I used to think what distinguishes the Church is the images in it. When you go to the Protestant Church there is *nothing* but the cross.¹¹⁷

As the newly married couple Jad and Maria came back from their honeymoon for their first visit to church, it is the lack of candles that threw Maria off balance. ‘What can I *do* here?’, she asked her new husband, ‘there are no candles in your church. I like to light candles in church’.¹¹⁸ The absence of images and icons, of candles, of incense, of ornate utensils, of clerical vestments, of choreographed movements and gestures, creates the effect of total physical emptiness.

¹¹⁴ Eva, Interview, December 2009.

¹¹⁵ More on the history of the Protestant Church in Lebanon: H. Badr, ‘Evangelical Missions and Churches in the Middle East: Lebanon, Syria and Turkey’, in *Christianity: A History in the Middle East*, ed. H. Badr, Beirut, Middle East Council of Churches [MECC] 2005; U. Makdesi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East*, New York: Cornell University Press 2008; and H. Murre-van den Berg (ed.), *New Faiths in Ancient Lands: Western Missions in the Middle East in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* Leiden: Brill 2006.

¹¹⁶ Those Influenced by the Liturgical Movement and by ecumenical engagement see N. Lossky, J. Miguez Bonino, J. Pobee, T. Stransky, G. Wainwright, P. Webb (eds.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva: WCC Publications 1991, 616–618.

¹¹⁷ Eva, December 2009.

¹¹⁸ Conversation with Jad, August 2012.

This feeling continues with the women who move regularly between their very ornate and full mother church building and the ‘empty’ Protestant architecture. The ‘emptiness’ is even more highlighted during feast days where little seems to change in the décor of the Protestant church and liturgy.¹¹⁹ The space inside most Protestant Churches in Lebanon is mostly sober and understated. Unadorned white walls, transparent windows designed to bring in natural light (complemented by white neon lighting for extra visibility),¹²⁰ straight and well aligned wooden benches facing the pulpit, and a long thin carpet leading from the entrance to the pulpit. The design of the church is longitudinal with the congregation and the officiant located in two different spaces that rarely overlap; the celebrant remains in his quarters whereas the congregation is seated orderly on the benches except when one or two members would step up front for the readings. A feeling of calmness and concentration reigns in the building; order and discipline are underlined by the clearly printed and strictly followed orders of worship. Even the air is clear and transparent. However, this emptiness experienced is not to be understood as an emptiness of deprivation ‘where one feels empty’ but an anticipating emptiness ‘filled with the presence of that which cannot be expressed in any finite form’: the dematerialized.¹²¹

In contrast, the Antiochian Orthodox churches are experienced by the women as having a ‘thick’ texture. While they speak of ‘*going* to the Protestant Church’ and ‘*sitting* on the pews’, they talk of ‘*entering* the Orthodox rite’ as one would enter a sphere where the air has consistency or viscosity. In that ‘sphere’, the human body is not only surrounded but

¹¹⁹ Not surprisingly knowing that the Protestant Reformed faith slowly developed into a dematerialized form of religion, see Barnard, Cilliers, Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, chapters 9 and 12; both a practical theological and a cultural development. Also a systematic concern: “Despite all resistance to Gnostics, a certain embarrassment about theological appreciation of all earthly, material things is continually noticeable in the churches of the Reformation and it is reflected in the doctrine of the sacraments.” (Brinkman, *Sacraments of Freedom*, 60).

¹²⁰ Taking into consideration Lukken’s description of how “light plays an important role” in the use of space and the perception of objects and actions. G. Lukken, *Rituals in Abundance: Critical Reflections on the Place, Form and Identity of Christian Ritual on Our Culture*, Liturgia Condenda 17, Leuven: Peeters Publishers 2005, 367.

¹²¹ J. Baek, *Nothingness: Tadao Ando's Christian sacred space*, Abingdon: Routledge 2009, 19. Emptiness, risks in our modern mentality to be connected with negative emotions, however it should not be confused with lack of spirituality and religious meaning. In Paul Tillich’s words “emptiness is a sacred word of God”, emptiness is “one of the very essences of Protestant theology”, Baek, *Nothingness*, 23.

submerged, totally immersed,¹²² in what the women call ‘spirituality’. Before the women do anything at all their body is enveloped by a multitude of sensations. It is enveloped by the warmth from the array of candles and the different sources of soft light, dazzled by the glare of the golden icons, chandeliers and the clerical outfits, pressed and pushed by the masses of others who move around and press on each other (particularly during Holy Week), teased by the smell of incense and melting wax, and enchanted by the continuous tunes, ruffle of the clerical garments, cling of the liturgical vessels, ascension of smoke etc.

The building is more square-like and topped with a frescoed dome. Everywhere one looks there is an object of interest. Though the benches face the iconostasis, the walls are lined up with high seats in a U shape and the cantors sit sideways towards the front. The faithful do not all sit down, some stand and some walk in and out; even the priest is in continuous motion disappearing behind the iconostasis and reappearing via another door, facing the people then facing the altar, walking among the congregation and then prostrating to the floor. The liturgy seems to have a life of its own that the faithful joins, or gets immersed into. Every day of Holy Week has a different liturgy with its own objects, lighting and movements. Good Friday, referred to as the *funeral of Jesus*, is re-enacted with vivid details, processions and intense emotions.

These two perceptions of ‘emptiness’ and ‘thickness’ alternated create a certain tension or tug on the level of the bodily experience of the feast.¹²³ It is in the context of this tension between an immersed body in a ‘thick’ context and a separate body in an ‘empty’ context that the women are oriented spatially and located temporally.

Orientation. Bodily Compass

These two contexts in their thickness and emptiness press or de-press the body of the women and orient them in certain directions. In his *Theory of Religion*, Thomas Tweed underlines that ‘religions represent, regulate and alter the body’¹²⁴ and that ‘religiously formed bodies function as the initial watch and compass’.¹²⁵ With the metaphor of the

¹²² This reminds us of the immersion in the baptismal font in the Byzantine tradition as a total dip. A symbolic drowning.

¹²³ One has to imagine the effect of hot and cold showers.

¹²⁴ Tweed, 100.

¹²⁵ Tweed, 97.

compass¹²⁶ in mind, we look at how the bodies of the women in this research are oriented in the liturgical spaces they know.

Looking at the body in the Orthodox liturgy, we described how the women experience a thickness affecting all their senses and related to it a perception of ‘metaphysical’ fullness where the space of the Church is inhabited by a ‘tangible’ *presence*. In this context, the bodies of the women are drawn, or in their own words ‘pulled’¹²⁷ towards the body of Christ as experienced in the liturgical act.

The feeling of being ‘pulled’ or drawn towards the body of Christ and the desire to come in touch with it is one of the main driving forces behind the women’s avidness to celebrate parts of Holy Week in their Eastern tradition. The Body of Christ is located¹²⁸ for them in the various elements of the celebration of the feast, even in the texture of the air itself. While Antoinette ‘touches the Body of Jesus’ in the paraded shroud of Good Friday, Leena participates in the tradition of ‘whispering to the Body’ scriptural readings.

‘I sit next to the –you know–body of Jesus, and the nun hands me the gospel and I start reading where the person before me stopped.(...) it should be loud enough for – you know– Jesus to hear, but not for the others to hear’, explained Leena.

The Body of Jesus is not only encountered in the embroidered shroud or the flowers covering it, but also in the water sprinkled on the faithful, the incense that envelops them, the laurel leaves that falls on their heads and the copper bells ringing.

The body of Christ becomes *present*, palpable, audible and odorant¹²⁹ in the thickness of the liturgical context. It is with their very bodies that the women encounter the Body of Christ.

¹²⁶ Chauvet puts this same concept in other words; designating religion a symbolic order he says “symbolic order ...allows individuals to orient themselves in space, find their place in time, and in general situate themselves in the world in a significant way – in short, to find their identity in a world that makes ‘sense’”. In Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 84.

¹²⁷ “The Liturgy pulls you” Najat, *December* 2009. “The Orthodox...it pulls you more...the sounds, the tunes” Antoinette, *December* 2009. The verb “pull” confers an active role to the liturgy and its elements; the liturgy here is a subject.

¹²⁸ David Brown explains this by defending the physicality of the Presence of Christ in *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary*, Oxford Scholarship Online 2008, Part III.

¹²⁹ An experience shaped by the confluence of culture and tradition, in particular an incarnational theology traced back to theologians such as John of Damascus, Maximus the Confessor and John Chrysostom. See A. Louth, trans. and intro., St John of Damascus, *Three Treaties on the Divine Images*, Crestwood, NY: St

This encounter is an immediate, intimate and personal one. The atmosphere surrounding Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, or the Easter Vigil sinks deeply into the skin and the very pores of the women; the distance between their bodies and the body of Christ is crossed in the ‘thick’ elements of the liturgical celebration and by this orients them *upward*.

The women interviewed described the experience in the Orthodox Church and in particular at this feast with spatially vertical metaphorical language. ‘When I enter the byzantine rite, I feel elevated’, explained Najat. Fida expounded: ‘When I hear the tunes and look at the Church, the lighting and the icons on all walls and the smell of incense, I feel sometimes that I am soaring over the clouds’ at another point she adds ‘you feel different, I look upwards, it has this cloud and the Virgin Mary in it or Jesus and oh, I feel I am flying with them when the tunes are nice and the chanting is beautiful’.¹³⁰

Strikingly, the manner in which the women describe their spatial position in the Orthodox liturgical celebration coincides with what research in cognitive science labels as the autocentric frame of reference.¹³¹ Relying on psychologist Trigant Burrow, Tweed clarifies the difference between autocentric and allocentric frames of reference.¹³² While allocentric spatial perception ‘relates locations to each other and to environmental landmarks’ autocentric framing is ‘in terms of the embodied subject, who constructs a spatial model from extensions of the three body axes’¹³³ so as things are perceived to be located behind, above or to the right of the worshiper. In this framing what is physically all around the women -- next to them, behind them, in front of them-- orients them upward. Quoting Vergote, Chauvet clarifies that these schemes of orientation ‘indicate an existential topography which is constitutive of the internal structure of the human being’.¹³⁴

Vladimir’s Seminary 2003; A. G. Cooper, *The Body in Saint Maximus the Confessor: Wholly Flesh, Wholly Deified*, *Oxford early Christian studies eBook*, Oxford University Press Premium 2005 and N. Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, Oxford Scholarship Online 2011.

¹³⁰ Fida, *December* 2009.

¹³¹ Chauvet refers to this same scheme as ‘primary symbolism’. He says: “These corporal schemes constitute the primary mediations of every possible identification” by differentiation, Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 148.

¹³² Tweed, 93.

¹³³ Tweed, 93.

¹³⁴ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 149.

If we were to imagine this experience using Euclidean vectors, we would have to imagine arrows pointing towards the body from the space around it, pressing on it and resulting in an arrow starting in the body and pointing upwards indefinitely. This compass points 'North'. Put in other words, coming physically in touch with the materially present Christ in the liturgical celebration results in directing the women towards a 'heavenly' realm.

In the Reformed worship on the other hand another framing seems to be more often used to express the experience of space. The women do not relate objects to their own physical bodies and position but rather 'objects' seem to be experienced in relation to each other, coming closer to what is called the intrinsic spatial frame where the part is expressed in its relation to another part of the space. Instead of using their own bodies as a point of reference, or fixed more absolute points, the women describe the liturgical celebration with 'on the pews', 'behind the pulpit', 'at the end of the Church', 'outside the Church' etcetera.

The 'empty' space to which they go does not immerse their body, but seems to place their bodies alongside, in front of and behind other bodies. Their bodies are rather individual and distinct entities that do not merge nor soar. They are clear and separated from the bodies seated next to them on the benches and barely touching them. They are grounded and controlled bodies that perform conscious and ordered actions such as standing, sitting, opening, offering, reading, singing, taking, etc. each as a distinct organized and conscious action. The experience and perception of emptiness – even if relative – contributes to achieve 'gravity and centeredness'.¹³⁵ This emptiness, characterized by light and lightness, is hailed by Van der Leeuw as a context that frees from materiality¹³⁶ and by the architect Tadao Ando as promoting 'quietism and introspectiveness' giving rise to 'the eloquence of silence'.¹³⁷

In such a setting, the women do not speak of the body of Christ, of touching it, of talking to it, or being pulled by it. The will of God or of Christ rather than his body becomes the focus.

¹³⁵ Barnard, Cilliers, Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, chapter 7.

¹³⁶ H.G. Hubbeling, *Divine Presence in Ordinary Life, Gerardus van der Leeuw's Twofold Method in his Thinking on Art and Religion*, Nieuwe Reeks, 49/1, North Holland Publishing Company 1986, 31.

¹³⁷ Baek, 21.

An acute awareness of the general absence¹³⁸ of the material Body of Christ, his physical distance,¹³⁹ and the infrequency of its communal sharing¹⁴⁰ is compensated by a focus on his will. In this cognitively enriching context the women say ‘things are clearer’.¹⁴¹ This will is being proclaimed geographically from one point and it is towards that one point that the women physically direct their bodies, ears and eyes: the pulpit. The women experience sitting in the Reformed Church by saying ‘It is like going to a school’¹⁴² or ‘I go to hear what I should do...my mind is active’.¹⁴³ The person of the pastor, his voice and his words, is the point from which a vector emerges towards each and every body sitting in the church. Behind the pastor who is standing at the elevated pulpit is a highly positioned cross. That cross positioned high, at a distance and behind the pastor functions as a metaphysical point of reference for the women who experience the physical presence of Christ as being somewhere high and far and whose will is being proclaimed via the pastor. Translated in vectorial language, we should imagine an arrow that emerges from the highly located bare cross and that passes via the pastor’s mouth towards the women, as a result arrows emerge from the women towards what is around them and ahead of them. The ‘arrow’ coming towards them coaxes them to look outside of themselves and ponder ‘what to do’.¹⁴⁴

While in the Orthodox celebration the women speak of the liturgy, the rite and its elements, in the Protestant celebration they speak of the pastor and his words. The effect of the Orthodox liturgy we have explained is an elevation towards what is heavenly; the effect of the sermon and Protestant liturgy on the other hand is an increased awareness of the world and the others outside of the self. While in the Orthodox celebration their compass pointed

¹³⁸ That which is perceived as absent, is experienced in its distance, invisibility or incomprehensibility; see Kubicki, 231.

¹³⁹ The physical distance perceived stems from and is shaped by the general Reformed understanding that Christ’s “human Body has ascended and sat with the Father” see Wandel, 175. See also J. Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding: Windows into Christian Practice*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academy 2003; D. Tripp, ‘The image of the Body in the Formative Phases of the Protestant Reformation’, in *Religion and the Body*, ed. Sarah Coakley, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 131–154.

¹⁴⁰ The Reformed Church in Lebanon in general shares in the Lord’s Supper once a month. A frequency, though relatively high, is considered very scant by the women in this research.

¹⁴¹ Nada, *December*, 2009.

¹⁴² Antoinette, *December* 2009.

¹⁴³ Nada, *December* 2009.

¹⁴⁴ The expression “what to do”, to know what to do or learn what to do, used often by the women in the context of the Reformed Liturgy, refers mostly to ethical behaviour and to a life of piety.

upward, in the Reformed celebration it seems to point *outward*. Out of the individual body and towards what is around them.¹⁴⁵ To illustrate, Fida had explained that ‘everything and everyone seem to vanish’ in the Orthodox liturgy while in the Protestant context everything and everyone seem to *impose* themselves. Emptiness and thickness accomplish the opposite of their texture. Thickness, engages the women’s bodies and elevates them, emptiness isolates the bodies of the women and engages them.¹⁴⁶

Temporality, personal and liturgical Watch

Tweed speaks of religiously formed bodies acting both as compass and as watch. Picking up the second clause of Tweed’s metaphor, we will expand on how the women experience time in the two traditions. In each of the different liturgies a certain understanding and experience of time is inscribed in the bodies of the women. Underlining that ‘culturally constructed, recorded, and transmitted forms – the symbols God, cross, and heaven as well as narratives that frame them, the emotions that encode them, the artifacts that anchor them, and the rituals that convey them – mediate devotees’ experiences and representations of time’,¹⁴⁷ we look at how the women live ‘history’ in the different liturgical cultures and traditions.

Besides the fact that one church belongs to their past and the other is acquired at a later stage in life, the liturgical realities produce a different understanding, perception and practice of time. In this section we would like to highlight two aspects of time that seem relevant for our discussion. The *first* is the experience of salvation history as being complete in the Orthodox liturgy whereas it is ‘not yet’ in the Reformed. The *second* is the way the

¹⁴⁵ This coincides with Karl Barth’s “neo-zwinglian” “a-theology” of the sacraments and the centrality of ethics that overshadows the Lord’s Supper. See James J. Buckley, ‘Christian Community, Baptism and Lord’s Supper’ in J. Webster (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Karl Barth*, Cambridge Companions Online: Cambridge University Press 2006, 195–203. The Lebanese Reformed pastors and theologians are educated in a seminary with a Barthian inkling. The liturgical theology practiced in general is inspired both by Barth and by an *Americanized* Heidelberg Catechism inherited from the missionaries of the 19th century, See Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*. It is therefore not surprising that sacramental activities point to ethical imperatives in the experience of the women.

¹⁴⁶ This reminds of Chauvet’s comment that what emptiness achieves is to create “the place from which humans can come to their truth”, Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 63.

¹⁴⁷ Tweed, 93.

women relate to that history which is by interlacing their own story with it in the Orthodox liturgy, and by being addressed by it in the Reformed liturgy.

An obvious mention of time is the label given to the two churches as being respectively the 'old Church' and the 'new Church'.¹⁴⁸ The Protestant Church referred to as the new Church has its origin in the imagination of the women somewhere in the West¹⁴⁹ at a very recent time while the old Church has no starting point or place, as if it has always existed. This perception is lived in the way the women experience time in general in the Protestant Church as being removed from Church history¹⁵⁰ and talking from today and for today. The Protestant church, in their description, is actual and contemporary,¹⁵¹ interested in the past as far as the gospel narrative is concerned and directed to a future yet to come.

In the celebration of the liturgy in the Orthodox Church a different history and time awareness is depicted. Time is experienced as being continuous and complete. The Easter season in particular recalls 'history' from creation till the eschatological expectation. The icons and frescoes reinforce this and fill in history with biblical characters, early church fathers, Saints as well as future expectations placing the worshippers physically in the midst of this history.¹⁵² In the Protestant liturgy, on the other hand, the past is behind and invisible; the eschatological future is far ahead and longed for; and the gospel is addressing them now where things have to be done (i.e. care for the poor, act justly, show concern for the elderly, etc). Time is perceived as short in the Reformed Liturgy and as more exigent.¹⁵³ The liturgy is experienced as a *process* where every service builds on the one before it and where one learns new things and moves forward. Antoinette emphasizes this aspect by repeating throughout her story the expression 'growing in faith' or 'maturing' in relation to

¹⁴⁸ A label given by Nada, December 2009.

¹⁴⁹ Martin Luther is being constantly referred to in the discourse of the women as the initiator of this Church.

¹⁵⁰ A perception promoted by the fact that the Protestant Church does not mention the Church Fathers and the Saints and uses contemporary language in worship.

¹⁵¹ Most women used the term "modern" to refer to the Protestant Church in general.

¹⁵² Images "represent or actualizes things immediately and directly" and a direct correspondence is suggested between images and the present. See M. Maffesoli, 'Everyday Tragedy and creation: Translated from the French by Karen Isabel Ocaña' in *Cultural Studies* 18/2-3 (2004), 201-210, 203. This visual effect corresponds with Eastern Orthodox spirituality where "in the eucharist"- and by extension the sacramental domain- "the union of God and world, which is behind us and ahead of us, is already a present reality" see Brinkman, 59.

¹⁵³ A perception reinforced by the fact that worship services are shorter than in the Orthodox Church and that there are no repetitions, a fact mentioned often by the women.

the Reformed liturgy. Fida explains ‘I learn in the Protestant Church’ and Nada speaks of change and new information. Time on the other hand is slow – it even stops – in the Orthodox liturgy which is experienced more as an *event* that can be revisited every year and which in itself does not change nor asks for change.

These two perceptions of *event* in one context and *process* in the other, or put differently of *already* and *not yet*, parallel Gerard Lukken’s remarks about the difference between the Eastern and Western traditions. Lukken traces a link between the focus on the already in the Eastern tradition and more space for bodily expressions and enactment, and between the not yet of Western tradition and its lacks in bodily performance.¹⁵⁴

We come now to the second relevant aspect of the perception of time. Besides being experienced as complete, history in the Orthodox liturgy is experienced as a contiguous and actualisable entity. Biblical narratives and events from the tradition can be ‘taken off the wall’ and made alive again. The narrative of the women at the grave on the morning of the resurrection functions in just such a way for the women in question. When celebrating Good Friday or the Easter Vigil, the women interviewed explained how the story comes to life and they themselves take part in the story or take a role in the enactment of the story. Just like they can come physically in touch with the body of Christ they can also come in touch with the history and enter the story.

‘Oh, I wish you could go to (the Church of) Mar Elias Bel Tyna’, told Antoinette, ‘you would feel that you are living what he has offered for you but with joy. The greatness of Jesus is that he made you sad on Friday but Saturday is the Saturday of the light. Look how wonderful he is even his pain becomes joy. You get out of the church singing. You spend more than one hour and 45 minutes singing... And you sing how the ladies went and how they spread incense and the perfume and how they visited him and his suffering... at one point they are carrying the - let’s say - body of Christ and you are taking a blessing from it and lighting candles and then when you are going out you take the flowers (that are laid on the shroud) and you go back to your home and you hide them in the closets of your house between the cloths of your children to take the blessing of Jesus... all this from the body of Jesus’.¹⁵⁵

The women at the cross and the women at the grave are favorite moments for the women considered for this research. Their eagerness to participate in the re-enactment of these

¹⁵⁴ Lukken, 18–19.

¹⁵⁵ Antoinette, *December* 2009.

narratives can be explained by the fact that they see an intersection between their own personal life and experiences and the flow of these stories. Death, decay, life, sadness, and disappointments are themes that come to the foreground. In the celebration of these liturgies the women relive their own moments of encounter with death and dying and with the deceptions of life.

By entering salvation history as enacted in the Orthodox liturgy they bring with them their own history to which they cling dearly. Their individual narrative takes over the performed narrative. For Nada the Easter narrative, particularly at Good Friday, coincides with her story at the death bed of her own brother:

‘At the end he had apnea’, she explained, ‘he could not breath, I told him ‘take my breath but do not go’. See, the Virgin Mary could let go. She could let go of her son, she saw him on the cross and stood there watching because she knew what he should still do. But though I knew he (my brother) is going to heaven I could not let go of my brother’s body. I should have. But I still cannot’.

Also Hind lost her brother years ago. He was kidnapped during the civil war and twelve years later sent home as a corpse. Since then, Good Friday for Hind is the time to mourn her brother and try to touch him through Christ’s body. ‘The feast is not a feast to me since then. I go to the funeral of Jesus to cry. See, the picture of my brother is with me. I will not let go of him’.

Holding on to the ‘body’ of the beloved dead ones and holding on to the wounds of their own bodies, holding on to their family heritage and memories, the women deal with the material objects of the liturgy as an incarnation or embodiment of all that matters or mattered to them. As their bodies get engaged in the liturgical celebration it is their own histories that are engaged. Every tear they have ever shed is brought back in the celebration and shed again. Antoinette sees all of her life struggles, engaged in the liturgical celebration. Her displacement during the war, losing her house and her village, her struggles to conceive children, her continuous plight to make ends meet come into the liturgical celebration on Good Friday. In the context of Holy week, it is their brokenness and their wounds that are encountered in the liturgical celebrations.

On the other hand, in the Reformed liturgy, it is not an overlap between personal narrative and liturgical narrative that is experienced but a confrontation between the two. Just like

there is physical distance between their bodies and the body of Christ, there is a distance between their story and the gospel story which rather than merging with their narrative and cluttering with it, confronts it from outside and gives it a lesson. The women ‘learn’ from the narrative by listening to the sermon and deducing a clear applicable message that once extracted can be used for their own future narrative. Here, the gospel narrative functions perpendicularly to the narrative of the women rather than inherently; it interrupts it.

III. A MATRIX FOR NEGOTIATION

Continuing with Tweed’s *Theory of Religion*, a second phase after the orientation via the ‘watch and compass’ is building and inhabiting. ‘As clusters of dwelling practices’, he explains, ‘religions orient individuals and groups in time and space, transform the natural environment, and allow devotees to inhabit the worlds they construct’.¹⁵⁶ However, in our case orientation in space and time does not lead to change of the environment by building, nor to the inhabiting of these places. We will show in what follows that the combination and alternation of the two different spatial and temporal orientations in one body leads to the creation of new symbolic networks that provide the context for *gliding* and *negotiating*.

Moving and Gliding

We have seen in part 2.B how the women, through the orientation of their bodies, seem to be oriented both *Up* and *Out*. In the Orthodox liturgy the orientation is upward as they are filled with a feeling of ‘soaring’ and ‘flying’ towards the divine, however in the Protestant liturgy they are grounded and coaxed out of their delineated bodies and towards the others around them. To imagine them graphically the combination of the two vectors vertical and horizontal would result in a diagonal upward direction. As far as the perception of time is concerned, they experience both an *already* and a *not yet*, as well as a time mingled with their narrative and a time addressing them from outside of their narrative.

Howbeit, these spatial orientations and temporal experiences do not remain on the level of topography and calendars. Incorporated in the bodies of the women, the differences in

¹⁵⁶ Tweed, 82.

spatial and temporal¹⁵⁷ participation flex the matrix within which they operate. The celebration of Easter structured in the braiding of the different liturgies creates a larger context where the women are located as if in a ductile matrix gliding between ground and heaven, between every-thing and no-thing, between thickness and emptiness, between inside and outside, and between the cryptically mysterious and the seemingly understandable. The metaphor of gliding helps us to convey two aspects of the created context and these are a sense of *freedom* and of *dynamics*.

In Tweed's observations of Cuban immigrants in Miami, – which have so far assisted in interpreting our field – the itinerant faithful find spatial and temporal orientation and then express that in the religious buildings that they erect and in which they liturgically dwell. These buildings reflect their point of orientation and parallel their sense of time.¹⁵⁸ The women in this research have neither the power nor the desire to erect or build public spaces¹⁵⁹ that meet their liturgical orientations. The buildings are already there; instead of *building* they *choose* combinations of buildings that meet their needs. It is not in just any Orthodox church that parts of Easter are to be celebrated, nor in just any Protestant church. Particular buildings are chosen for the occasion, buildings whose combination produces the exact direction the compass of the women needs. For Antoinette, it is *Mar Elyas bel Tyna's* Orthodox church and not any other that can produce the experience she seeks, combined with the 'intelligent' exposition in the National Evangelical Church of Beirut. For Leena, it is the monastery of Saint John the Baptist that plays a role facilitating 'soaring' that will be followed by a grip on reality in a particular Protestant Church. Thus, instead of physically 'building and inhabiting', of creating a place to which they attach themselves, they unfasten the bounds of institutional churches and create their own liturgical matrix.

By loosening the binds of particular traditions, and gliding physically from one to the other they disentangle themselves from the existing symbolic networks. Expanding on the body, Chauvet explains: '... each person's own body is structured by the system of values or

¹⁵⁷ We see here Derrida's "becoming-time of space and the becoming-space of time", in J. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass, USA: The University of Chicago, The Harvester Press 1982, 8.

¹⁵⁸ An example of this is Tweed's reference to the shrine of Our Lady of Charity where both the orientation towards a lost and desired Cuba and an experience of exile and up-rootedness take shape in a specially designed building.

¹⁵⁹ They do however construct their own private domestic spaces.

symbolic network of the group to which each person belongs and which makes up his or her *social and cultural body*'.¹⁶⁰ For Chauvet, the church in its tradition is the symbolic network here. The women in this study, moving between the different churches and traditions, disentangle themselves from one symbolic network to move to the other; yet they themselves are *part* of these symbolic systems. In this line of thinking and following Chauvet we have to conclude that the women are lost liturgically, as he says: 'outside their symbolic network bits and fragments become insignificant'¹⁶¹ and that 'having lost their directions, subjects are lost as well'.¹⁶² Nevertheless, though the women considered in this research have two directions, *Up* and *Out*, and are moving in and out of the established symbolic networks, we do not choose to call them lost but rather gliding in a ductile liturgical matrix.

In this case the 'bits and fragments' recombine in an ever renewing symbolic-network, or flexible liturgical matrix, particular to every woman and instead of getting lost they find meaning in a context of multiple orientation. This liturgical matrix does not correspond with either one of the existing traditions nor can it be reduced to a mere addition of two traditions. Keeping in mind that the Protestant and Orthodox Churches are each a symbolic system, this matrix forms a new symbolic system that is a flexible blend.

The metaphor of gliding emphasizes as well the dynamic position of the women. Structuring their feasting experiences in the various traditions the women do not simply find a fixed middle position, but oscillate in space and time. Soaring with the heavenly angels followed by a look into the reality of life, their sense of time is continually disrupted. Their liturgical celebrations are about a time that unfolds in human history and a time that enacts a heavenly celebration. The first 'time' timed by the famous clocks of the Protestant Churches,¹⁶³ starts and ends with punctuality and a second 'time' beats to the rhythm of chanting and speaks of eternity. They inhabit neither one of those times, yet dwell in an area between a heavenly timeline and an earthly clock. Tasting the already, here-and-now in

¹⁶⁰ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 150.

¹⁶¹ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 86.

¹⁶² Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 86.

¹⁶³ The Protestant Churches, via the first American Missionaries of the 19th century, are known to have introduced the first public clock in Beirut mounted on its bell tower. Their respect for time and known punctuality are still visible in the liturgy and are a mark of identity.

the Orthodox liturgy as well as experiencing the not-yet and not-here of the Reformed liturgy. This disruption in the experience of space and time –using the words of Judith M. Kubicki—does ‘challenge our understanding of presence and absence, as well as perception’.¹⁶⁴ And it is to this very topic of presence and absence that we will move now as we attempt to excavate the sacramental theology of this context of liturgical practice.

Negotiation

The questions: *where is Christ Present* and *how is Christ present* in the Eucharist, in the assembly or in the world are questions that haunted theologians and split communities ever since the first Christians. The magnitude of these questions is too large to be dealt with in this paper. Though they seem alien in their dogmatism to the life of the women, they are nonetheless questions that lie deep in the activity of ‘gliding’ described thus far.

The *difference* between the perception of presence and – by contrast– material absence of the body of Christ in the liturgical celebrations creates the context of gliding within which the women, through their bodies, seek Christ. While Christ is perceived to be *materially* very present in the Orthodox liturgical celebration of Easter, – and by extrapolation in the liturgy in general and the Eucharist – he is perceived to be *materially* absent¹⁶⁵ in a Protestant celebration which is otherwise Christocentric. With their bodies the women experience an immediate *presence* in the thick context and an awareness of a presence of *absence*¹⁶⁶ in the empty context. The particular structuring of their feast makes the women glide between these two perceptions, freeing themselves but also carrying the one into the other. Consequently, *it is with the experience of presence that they perceive the absence and vice versa, with the experience of absence that they perceive presence.*

¹⁶⁴ Kubicki, 233.

¹⁶⁵ We keep in mind here that the Reformed understanding of the Lord’s supper is that the spiritual character of Christ’s presence includes always the real character of his presence; spirituality is not in contrast with, but a synonym for reality. The idea of the Reformed adage is that the Lord’s presence is not meant as an ‘absentee Christology’.

¹⁶⁶ We remind that this absence is related to hidden-ess, invisibility and ‘untouchability’.

This dialectic of presence and absence reminds us of a Ricoeurian logic¹⁶⁷ and leads us to the argumentation of Chauvet who underlines that ‘Christian symbols signify an absence, and only so do they evoke a presence’.¹⁶⁸ To bring Chauvet into the discussion risks of complicating matters by introducing a Catholic theologian to a movement between an Orthodox and a Protestant tradition. It is however Chauvet’s post-modern approach rather than his tradition that is helpful here. Chauvet helps us understand the general perception in the liturgical matrix of the women for whom presence and absence illuminate each other. However, when we look at the details of Chauvet’s sacramental theology we notice a divergence at a crucial point. For Chauvet, in order to benefit from the symbolic power of the sacraments as mediated within the Church, faith has to ‘consent to loss’¹⁶⁹ and to ‘giving up the hope of finding the lost body of Christ’.¹⁷⁰

For him accepting the sense of absence (of the body of Christ) is vital to Christian faith. Seeking to see, touch and find the dead body of Jesus¹⁷¹ closes one’s eyes and leads her into non-faith. Alternatively, it is the hearing of the word and the administration of the sacraments that lead to recognizing the presence of the Absent One, of the resurrected.

Turning to the context of our field, it is precisely ‘the consent to loss’ that is a tenet to grapple with rather than to accept. There is no ‘consent to loss’ in the feasting activity of the women considered here. Alternatively, in the activity of gliding a dynamics of negotiation between *Presence* and *Absence* is evident. The women refuse to totally consent to absence, rather in their weaving of the different liturgical traditions they keep negotiating between distance and touch, in other words between presence and absence.

This negotiation is not a rational activity but rather a performative bodily one. The two realities working on the bodies of the women produce ‘spaces’ of indecision – expressed in our metaphor of gliding– where the women stand between asserting presence and relativizing it or negating it. As she described her intense experience of presence in the procession of the shroud on Good Friday, Antoinette punctuates her narrative with spaces of

¹⁶⁷ P. Ricoeur, *La mémoire, L'histoire, L'oubli*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil 2000; P. Ricoeur, *Du Texte à l'Action, Essais d'herméneutique II*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil 1986.

¹⁶⁸ Brinkman, 69.

¹⁶⁹ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 170.

¹⁷⁰ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 177.

¹⁷¹ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 161.

hesitation. She uses for example the expression ‘let’s say’ to refer to the coffin of Christ and Body of Christ that is carried around in the procession. Though her experience of presence is intense, a counter perception disrupts it. The same space of indecision is found in Leena’s narration of her ‘whispering to the Shroud’. For Leena the expression ‘you know’ accompanied by a shrug of the shoulder, clearly expresses her hesitation; ‘whispering– you know– to Jesus’, she said. In the interviews and discussions with the women, this back and forth movement between asserting presence in the liturgical experience and negating it becomes even clearer. A negotiation is actively at work in this context instead of a Chauvet–ian ‘consent to loss’.

We clarify here that this hesitation or indecision, is both a result and a cause of the gliding. A cycle is created where moving between material presence and absence, already and not yet, generates more hesitation which creates more movement in order to postpone decision. This gliding reminds us of Derrida’s *différance*, in the interplay between difference and deferral, and which according to G. Ward when ‘examined theologically, becomes the play between the presence and the impossibility of God’.¹⁷² The answer to the ‘where’ and ‘how’ of the presence of Christ is thus being deferred in the women’s gliding. ‘Consent to loss’ is replaced by *negotiation* through deferring, moving or gliding. An activity designed by the particular women and through which we see an appropriation and ownership of the feasting experience and its sacramental implications. In our last section we will attempt briefly to structure this resulting sacramental theology from the lived liturgical practice of Holy Week.

Negotiating at the Grave

In their practice of the Easter celebration, the women engage in a negotiation of the presence of Christ, and by doing so form the shape of their theology of the sacramental. In what follows we will try to extract and explicate this theology that is lived and expressed in the body, its orientation and movement, rather than in texts or rational analysis. We do so briefly in dialog with Chauvet whose approach we have adopted but from whom this case has parted at the ‘consent to loss’.

¹⁷² G. Ward, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995, 232.

Chauvet believes that ‘we can extract an entire theology of the ‘sacramentality’ of the Church from the Lucan texts’.¹⁷³ Luke 24: 13–35, Acts 8:30–31, and Acts 9: 19–20. The major text among these three for him is the classical road to Emmaus. In this story Chauvet explains that the desire to find–see–touch the body of Jesus (the dead body) hinders faith, and that ‘passage to faith...requires that one let go of the desire to see–touch–find, to accept in its place the hearing of the word’.¹⁷⁴ This key text, echoing in its structure the story of the baptism of the Ethiopian (Acts 8:30–31), and the conversion of Saul (Acts 9: 12–20), points in its use of sacraments, scripture and call to witness to the symbolic mediation of the church.

Nevertheless, the theology practiced by the women considered in this research seems to revolve around another text. Nowhere did the women articulate or link their theology to a particular text. Nonetheless, the selection of Easter events they choose to mark, the manner in which they live it, and the negotiating activity they engage in, suggest a certain reconstructed text. The hypothetical text would be the Easter narratives involving the women around the tomb. Among those John 20: 11–18, that of Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb, we suggest, would play a major role.¹⁷⁵ As in Chauvet’s analysis, the desire to see–touch–find the body of Christ is here also of great importance.

However, it defers from Chauvet’s texts in a number of ways. The heart of the narrative here is not a discussion or analysis of texts and doctrines but Mary engaging in a negotiation process with the ‘gardener’, in order to retrieve the missing body. Unlike in the other texts selected by Chauvet, the focus here is not on the institutional Church, represented by scripture, tradition and the institutionalized sacraments (Eucharist, Baptism and laying on of hands) but the material presence of the suffering Christ, the dead Christ, the resurrected Christ and how the women react/reacted to it and positioned themselves towards it. Instead of having two people discussing, teaching and the ‘third one’¹⁷⁶ joining

¹⁷³ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 170.

¹⁷⁴ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 162.

¹⁷⁵ Think of Nada’s identification with Mary the mother of Jesus, Antoinette walking in the procession of the Shroud, Leena whispering to the body.

¹⁷⁶ Cleopas and his companion were joined by the ‘traveller’, Philip and the Ethiopian witnessed the pouring of the Spirit and Paul and Ananias as well. A more detailed analysis can be found in L.M. Chauvet, *Du Symbolique au Symbole, Essai sur les sacrements*, Paris: Les Editions du Cerf 1979, 83.

them to reveal, in the story around the tomb we see an echo of what Nada in an interview calls ‘just me and the Lord’. A crying woman, on her own, looking for the body of Christ in the places where it could be, ready to negotiate to retrieve it by herself, prepared to hold on to it, but obediently going to witness in order to return the next Easter to negotiate again.

Though Chauvet calls looking for the actual body a pre-faith act, the women in this research do not look for the body in a pre-faith attitude. On the contrary, their faith takes shape through the negotiation around the body, and the mode and place of presence. By disentangling themselves from the symbolic networks, to set up gliding according to their own design, these women take responsibility for their own faith. In this context the institutional Churches host and set up the stage for the sacramental but are not *the* sacrament. When speaking of the symbolic mediation of the Church, Chauvet illustrates with the following imaginary dialog between Luke and the Christians: ‘If it is true that Jesus is alive how is it that we cannot see him? Luke answers with “the Church”’.¹⁷⁷ The women in this research – who insist on ‘seeing him’ – would hypothetically answer this question with “elements and aspects of the churches mingled together”. Not one church can mediate alone, nor a joining of two Churches but elements/acts from here and there put together and continuously revised by the women themselves. This theology that does not consent to loss, does not embrace the mediating role of *one* Church either but rather personally constructs channels within the Churches.

Another striking difference with Chauvet’s texts is the fact that this narrative occurs around a tomb rather than on the ‘road’.¹⁷⁸ It is around a tomb that the women locate themselves. The tomb of Jesus which is the place of his death and resurrection is in the understanding of interdisciplinary critic and theorist Mieke Bal a site of history where one meets with nostalgic longing, horror, and ‘a desire to escape the past’.¹⁷⁹ Around the tomb¹⁸⁰ the

¹⁷⁷ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 171.

¹⁷⁸ Road to Emmaus, Road to Damascus, Road to Gaza.

¹⁷⁹ M. Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*, London, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999, 53.

¹⁸⁰ The centrality of the tomb is reflected in their liturgical activity around the tomb on Good Friday (the funeral of Jesus) and Saturday of the Light. But it can also be seen in other aspect of the liturgical life where candles, flowers, death and tears are recurrent themes as well as the visual omnipresence and remembrance of deceased relatives.

women try to make sense of the events of their life but also to detach themselves from them and to move on to the resurrection morning.

In the gospel narrative of Mary at the grave we see the women's negotiation and hesitation but we also see their orientation *up* and *out* and their position in an *already* but also *not yet* time. At the grave, Mary has both a sacramental experience of seeing Christ and an obedience 'to go and tell', an ethical imperative. Christ's comment 'do not hold on to me for I have not yet ascended' also places this episode in a not yet time though he is present right there in front of her. The ambiguities of the liturgical matrix they glide in reflect this passage in both what Mary seeks and experiences at the grave and in what she is told to do.

With this scriptural narrative acting as a background, the women form their faith through their bodily negotiation of presence and absence in the performance of the Easter liturgical season. Tugged by both a sacramental and an ethical perception, they glide in a flexible matrix and keep forming their liturgical theology throughout their lives.

IV. CONCLUSION

This merging of two symbolic systems has both theological and cultural aspects to it. On the one hand it mirrors a post-modern spirituality and a 're-emergence of appreciation for the emotions and intuition as valid avenues for arriving at truth'.¹⁸¹ On the other, by living this tension between presence and absence, between immanence and transcendence these particular women performatively and instinctively guard themselves from 'contrasting' theological positions that recurred throughout history. These contrasts that jeopardize essential Christian doctrines have been the topic of discussion in many ecumenical circles¹⁸² and have found their settlement mainly in accepting such ambivalence and 'paradoxal' constructions.¹⁸³ Far from ecumenical theological debates, the women considered in this research have found their own constructions relevant for their individual stories.

¹⁸¹ Kubicki, 224.

¹⁸² Such as *Groupe des Dombes*, see Brinkman, 69. and Lossky, Bonino, Pobee, Stransky, Winwright and Webb (eds.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 445-446.

¹⁸³ Brinkman, 70.



Aquarium Altar

Photo: R. Nasrallah

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Women'.

Chapter 4: Rearranging Things

How Protestant attitudes shake the objects in the piety of Eastern Christian women

I. INTRODUCTION

February 2010 (Leena's spiritual biography):

"At my home in Beirut there is a pillar on which I have placed a wooden cross at the top then four other Icons: Christ, the Virgin Mary, Saint John the Baptist and Saint Nicholas, with a floor light that shines up on them. This is my sanctuary. Candles and incense are two elements I use at times as the Orthodox say it symbolizes the presence of God."

August 2012 (a visit to Leena's home):

Leena has changed the cross to a more modern simple one. The Icons of Christ Pantocrator and the Virgin Mary, both replicas of Icons from Saint Catherine's monastery, are still there but Leena is no longer satisfied with them. They are "very glossy," she says, and she would rather exchange them for something similar to her newly-acquired Rublev Icons bought in Moscow: Christ the Redeemer and Saint Nicholas. "Unlike my aunt, who bought bejeweled silver-framed Icons, I have opted for those Icons. They are drawn on silk and mounted on wood. See, they are old, worn out, and simple. This is what I call Orthodox with a Protestant flavor." A statue of the Virgin Mary given as a present by a neighbor has been given away.

Christmas 2012 (conversation with Leena):

"Did I tell you? My altar is gone. I removed everything. The pillar is blank—I am reconsidering."

June 2013 (email exchange with pictures):

"This is how it looks now. I only mounted the cross on the pillar with the floor lighting." Christ Pantocrator, the Virgin Mary, and Saint John the Baptist are completely gone. The Rublev Icons of Christ the Redeemer and Saint Nicholas have migrated, together with the

older Saint Nicholas Icon and an engraved silver cross, to a glass-paneled cabinet alongside family photos, and are now lit from the top.

Leena's home altar, or collection of holy things, is unsettled, and the current arrangement is most probably not final. Much of what keeps this collection unsettled comes from the fact that Leena has a dual liturgical belonging. Leena belongs both to the Antiochian Orthodox Church and to a Lebanese Reformed Church.

In this article we consider the collections of 'holy things' that women in similar liturgical situations to Leena assemble and display. These Lebanese women come originally from Antiochian Orthodox Churches¹⁸⁴ or Maronite Churches,¹⁸⁵ and by marriage to a Reformed man they join a Lebanese Protestant Church. Joining the Reformed Church, they never completely leave their mother church, nor do they convert to the new tradition, but they keep physically and virtually moving between the two, and in-between the two or three traditions.¹⁸⁶ In their hybrid situation, these women bring many different traditions into creative combinations and form their own personalized liturgical world while still operating within the established churches. It is important to underline that these women do not form a separate new group or community but are individuals who negotiate the different traditions on their own.

We have used ethnographic methods in order to understand what happens to the liturgical lives¹⁸⁷ of these women in this particular situation. An intimate knowledge of the field, coupled with in-depth interviews, participant observation, and analysis of biographical essays highlighted the importance of things and material objects, such as Icons, pictures, oil, incense, candles, rocks, etc., in the piety of the women considered. "I am very weak in front

¹⁸⁴ Also known as Greek Orthodox or Rūm Orthodox Church. George Atiyyeh, "The Rise of Eastern Churches," in Habib Badr (ed.), *Christianity: A History in the Middle East* (Beirut: Middle East Council of Churches, 2005); Hanna Hunt, "Byzantine Christianity," in Ken Perry (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity* (USA: Blackwell publishing Ltd, 2007).

¹⁸⁵ Emma Loosley, Anthony O'Mahony, *Eastern Christianity in the Modern Middle East*, eBook, London: Routledge, 2010; Peter Galadza, "Eastern Catholic Christianity," in Ken Perry (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity*.

¹⁸⁶ Rima Nasrallah, Heleen Murre-van den Berg and Marcel Barnard, "Kinetics of Healing," in *Studia Liturgica*, 42/1-2, 2012, pp.270-284; Rima Nasrallah and Marcel Barnard, "Taking Liberties: The Fluid Liturgical Lives of Orthodox and Maronite Women within the Protestant Church in Lebanon," in *Journal for Eastern Christian Studies*, forthcoming.

¹⁸⁷ By 'liturgical lives' we refer to worship practices that are not confined to the walls of the church. See Marcel Barnard, Johan Cilliers, Cas Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture. Liturgical-Ritual Studies, Fields and Methods, Concepts and Metaphores*, (Liturgia Condenda, Leuven-Paris-Walpole: Peeters, 2014).

of these *things*,” Najat, one of the women, said. “Everywhere I go, I bring back a picture or object; I like to *collect* them.”¹⁸⁸

However, these material objects that would normally be inconspicuous in their daily piety and that are fixed by certain liturgical traditions collide with Protestant attitudes and are shaken by dissonant theological concepts. In what follows we will show how, in this murky situation, things are defamiliarized and yet re-emerge as active, flexible agents with which individual theologies are written and connections are achieved. The focus of this study is to read how the supposedly ‘normal’ religious objects that furnish the lives of these women are affected, and how they function in their new complex and fluid liturgical situation.

II. COLLECTIONS OF THINGS

“Media are intrinsic to religion,”¹⁸⁹ affirms Birgit Meyer. Material objects, visuals, texts, etc., are part and parcel of religion, even if in different religious traditions and cultures a different set of things furnishes the lives of the believers. In this paper we have chosen to focus on objects and images in the piety of these particular women. We use the word ‘image’ here as defined by Bruno Latour to refer to “any sign, work of art, inscription, or picture that acts as mediation to access something else.”¹⁹⁰ Moreover, we start with the belief that things are not mere accessories to faith life or simply tools for worship, but that they are constitutive of faith: they define it, form it, and can activate or break it.¹⁹¹ By taking such a position, we are consciously going against mainstream ‘modernist’ approaches to

¹⁸⁸ Emphasis added.

¹⁸⁹ Birgit Meyer, *Religious Sensations. Why Media, Aesthetics and Power Matter in the Study of Contemporary Religion*, (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit, inaugural lecture, 2006), p.12.

¹⁹⁰ We rely on Bruno Latour inspired by Marcel Barnard’s coupling of Latour’s insights with concerns of Practical Theology in Marcel Barnard, “Ambivalent Images. Rethinking Biennale 52 Venice/ Documenta 12 Kassel and the Task of Practical Theology,” in *International Journal of Practical Theology* 14/1 (2010) 68–85. See also Bruno Latour, “What is Iconoclasm? Or is There a World Beyond the Image Wars?” in Bruno Latour and Peter Wiebel (eds.) *Iconoclasm Beyond the Image Wars in Science Religion and Art*, ZKM centre for Art and Media Karlsruhe (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: The MIT Press, 2002), p.14. See also Bruno Latour, “How to be Iconophilic in Art, Science and Religion,” in Carrie Jones and Peter Galison, (eds.) *Picturing Science Producing Art*, (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 418–440.

¹⁹¹ Martien Brinkman, *Jesus Incognito: The Hidden Christ in Western Art since 1960* (Amsterdam, New York: Radopi, 2012), p.52.

religion, which consider it as “being an “inward,” “private,” and even “invisible” phenomenon.”¹⁹²

Material objects in the mother tradition of the women considered in this research are regarded as normal and thus are inconspicuous, unnoticed though very visible, in their spaces and piety.

“My parents are Orthodox,” explained Antoinette. “I grew up among the pictures of the saints. In our house we had the altar and on Saturday night we had to kneel next to it and pray, and the candle must be lit.”

These collections—housed in home altars or not—recall practices as old as late antiquity and have much older pre-Christian roots. David Frankfurter, scholar of ancient Mediterranean popular religions, maintains that—among others—Christians in late antique Syria¹⁹³ were very active in protecting and arranging their domestic space with the use of various kinds of holy objects and domestic altars.¹⁹⁴ Alex Garcia-Rivera, studying contemporary Hispanic Catholic home altar traditions,¹⁹⁵ traces these practices to early Christianity, as well reminding us that “early Christians constructed their home altars from bits of clothing, hair, flesh, or even bone from a martyr’s corpse.”¹⁹⁶ These were complemented by many other ‘tangible’ objects, such as “fruits, twigs, and text” as well as “oil, earth, rocks, water, dew, wine, “manna”, measure, cloth...”¹⁹⁷ brought back from pilgrimages. We also know that these were housed in “wall niches, aediculate, small murals, and even entire rooms for domestic devotions.”¹⁹⁸ The tradition of collecting all sorts of things from all sorts of places and mixing them together to bring the ‘holy’ home, protect the domestic space, affect healing, and simply surround oneself with the sacred, is thus one of the most ‘natural’ things for Eastern Christian women to do.

¹⁹² Birgit Meyer, *Mediation and the Genesis of Presence: Towards a Material Approach to Religion* (Utrecht: Utrecht University, Inaugural Lecture, 2012), p.6.

¹⁹³ Comprising today’s Lebanon.

¹⁹⁴ David Frankfurter, “The Interpenetration of Ritual Spaces in Late Antique Religions: An Overview,” in *Archiv Für Religions Geschichte*, Nov. 2008, p.201.

¹⁹⁵ See also Thomas Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp.103–109.

¹⁹⁶ Alex Garcia-Rivera, “Homemade faith,” in *US Catholic*, vol.59, 1994, no.11, p.50.

¹⁹⁷ Blake Leyerle, “Pilgrim Eulogiae and Domestic Rituals,” in *Archiv Für Religions Geschichte*, Nov. 2008, p.223.

¹⁹⁸ David Frankfurter, *The Interpenetration of Ritual Spaces*, p.201.

Najat, one of the women considered in this research, collects objects from holy sites she visits. From monasteries and places of pilgrimage she brings back cotton dipped in holy oil, incense in small plastic bags, pictures of saints, blessed water, candles, and Icons. It was in an abandoned fish tank that Najat intuitively started housing her collection. The aquarium stands in a corner of her kitchen and in it she puts all the items she has been incidentally collecting. "I did not plan it," she said, but this is how her home altar started. From a visit to Mount Sinai, she brought rocks that bear the fossil prints of the bush through which God spoke to Moses. From the feast of the *Transfiguration of the Lord* she brought blessed grapes, which, once dried, went into her aquarium-altar. In front of the fish tank Najat added a candle that is lit regularly, and a few Icons that need to stand out, as well as pictures of her grandchildren. The collection is made up of objects which come from an array of holy places: some of them are Antiochian Orthodox, some Maronite, some Coptic, and some even from the Protestant Church.

Scholars who study home altars across cultures and religions, such as Kay Turner,¹⁹⁹ suggest that altar making is an instinctive feminine activity; however, the collections we are looking at here stem from particular liturgical traditions which themselves promote this undertaking. The Antiochian Orthodox Church is insistent in establishing the veneration of the Icons. The Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy is celebrated with ostentation, pomp and visibility by parading the Icon of *the Restoration of the Holy Icons*. Antiochian Orthodox priests are diligent in visiting the homes of the faithful to sprinkle and bless their cherished objects²⁰⁰ and consecrate their Icons; anchoring them thus even more deeply in the piety and the homes of their owners. The Maronite tradition combines its Eastern and Oriental love of pictures and sacred objects with a Western Jesuit infusion of imagery—a heritage dating back to the 16th century. Painted images, medals, statues,²⁰¹ and rosaries²⁰² were added by these missionaries to the indigenous collections. Bernard Heyberger, historian of Lebanese and Syrian Christianity in Ottoman times, explains how in the 19th

¹⁹⁹ Kay Turner, *Beautiful Necessity: The Art and Meaning of Women's Altars* (Thames & Hudson Ltd, 1999).

²⁰⁰ Such as family pictures, bedrooms, doors, etc.

²⁰¹ Statues are often the center of piety in Maronite homes and are blessed through sprinkling with holy water at home by a visiting priest, or are taken upon purchase to a church to be consecrated.

²⁰² See more on the appropriation of the Rosary and its indigenization in Willy Jansen, "Arab Women with a Mission: The Sisters of the Rosary," in Martin Tamcke, Michael Martin (eds.) *Christian witness Between Continuity and New Beginnings. Modern Historical Missions in the Middle East*, (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2006), pp. 41–62.

century the Jesuits physically moved from house to house — literally carrying nails and hammers—to fix the pictures to the walls of homes.²⁰³ In addition, monasteries and pilgrimage sites of all Eastern traditions abound with things and objects, crafted or imported by the monks, nuns, or priests themselves and distributed or sold to the faithful.

Eastern Christian believers did their share in mixing these many traditions by creating altars and collections using the elements available and tailoring the collections to family needs and tastes.²⁰⁴ This religious *bricolage* is very obvious in the seemingly mismatching elements that make up the altars and decorate the homes of the women in this study. Najat, mentioned above, is not the only one who mixes Orthodox Icons with plastic statues of the Virgin Mary; Catholic rosaries with Orthodox consecrated bread (antidoron); Maronite saints with the ‘Protestant’ Sallman’s Head of Christ, etc.

These “normal” collections, or “authorized”²⁰⁵ media, are in turn handed down mostly from mother to daughter upon marriage, reminding us of Meyer’s remark that “sensational forms are transmitted and shared”.²⁰⁶

“When Jamal and I got married,” Stephanie narrates in her biography, “my mother came to my new house and helped me set up all the rooms and my belongings. Among the things she brought with her were small Icons to put above the door in each of the bedrooms and a cross above the entrance to the house. I did not object—I grew up seeing them in my own house and felt it was the natural thing to do. She also brought a statue of Saint Rita and a couple of souvenirs from trips she made to religious sites, and placed them on a shelf in my closet.”

These collections have the potential of nestling undisturbed in the homes of their new owners, who would with time add to them, embellish and appropriate them, and then hand

²⁰³ Bernard Heyberger, “De l’Image Religieuse à l’Image Profane? L’essor de l’image chez les chrétiens de Syrie et du Liban (XVII–XIX siècle),” in Bernard Heyberger et Sylvia Naef (eds.), *La multiplication des images en pays D’Islam*, Istambuler Texte und Studien 2 (Würzburg: Orient Institut der DMG, 2003), p.35.

²⁰⁴ Heyberger explains: “La juxtaposition de traditions iconographiques et stylistiques d’origine différente,...est un des traits caractéristiques de l’attitude des chrétiens orientaux à l’égard des images.” Heyberger, *De l’image religieuse à l’image profane*, p.41. This reminds us of David Frankfurter’s comment about “the essence of religious *bricolage* keyed to family needs and histories, to festival life, and to historical developments in the institution,” Frankfurter, “The Interpenetration of Ritual Spaces,” p.201.

²⁰⁵ Birgit Meyer, “Mediation and Immediacy: Sensational Forms, Semiotic Ideologies and the Question of the Medium,” in *Social Anthropology* 19/1, 2011, p.27.

²⁰⁶ Birgit Meyer, *Religious Sensations*, p.8.

down the unquestioned tradition to their children. However, in the cases considered in this research, this process does not happen undisturbed and these objects risk “breaking.”²⁰⁷

Stephanie continues: “With the exception of two remaining Icons in the kids’ rooms, all others have gone back to her at one time or another for different reasons (taking up space, fell off, broken, etc.). Needless to say they will not be replaced.”

Objects that were “fixed with nail and hammer,” sprinkled with holy water, established and defended in public processions, “fell off” in Stephanie’s new home. However— as we shall be showing—not completely.

III. DEFAMILIARIZING – DISENCHANTMENT

Right from the start of their encounter with the Protestant Church, the question of Icons, statues, and sacred objects in general becomes problematic and images immediately become an issue that needs to be resolved. Nada stated her dilemma to the pastor who was about to marry her to her Protestant husband: “I told him: I am Orthodox and I have a question...I asked him about Icons—I love Icons”; Nada’s main concern suddenly became the fate of her Icons. In the meeting with the Protestant tradition, images and objects become a problem, and fear and confusion arise about what to do with these things. Objects had been thus far a natural element of the daily and religious environment. They often merged with the background of the living room, the bedroom, and the walls, never creating discomfort or anxiety. Yet suddenly they stand out as strangers or even intruders. Meyer explains that “media tend to ‘disappear’ when they are accepted as devices that, naturally as it were, merge with the substance which they mediate. On the other hand, they ‘appear’ if this synthesis is cracked.”²⁰⁸ In what follows we will show how the encounter with Protestant attitudes ‘cracks’ the synthesis to reveal the objects, questions their presence, and could even invite ‘iconoclasm’.

²⁰⁷ We will use the word ‘broken’ to refer to ‘cracks’ (Bruno Latour) or ‘inconsistencies’ within the collections or the altars. Guiding ‘Protestant’ themes and practices as we shall discuss do not fit with the rest of the women’s inherited theologies but rather create ambiguities. In turn these ambiguities ‘break’ the objects by making them questionable.

²⁰⁸ Birgit Meyer, “Medium,” *Material Religion*, vol.7, issue 1, p.63.

Cracking a synthesis

The Antiochian Orthodox and Maronite traditions both allow for a natural synthesis between these objects and the divine, both theologically and culturally. Objects such as Icons, pictures, and statues become more than just objects when consecrated, either officially by ecclesial authorities or spontaneously by ‘contamination’ in an altar or place of pilgrimage; in this way, they become holy things instead of merely human-made or natural objects. Not only do they become holy things because of, for example, Byzantine incarnational theology,²⁰⁹ but also because of a certain relation between the women and the objects.

Many thinkers, such as Ponge, Lacan, and Derrida, propose a distinction between *things* and *objects*. According to David Morgan, for example, things are “an ongoing colloquy between material characteristics and a patchwork of epistemological cataloguing.”²¹⁰ Though for ‘outsiders’ they might seem to be mere material objects, bits of paper, dirty rocks, or cotton swabs, for those owning and using them they exceed the status of objects and their value is more in a particular subject-object relation.²¹¹ It is both the theological conviction—be it incarnational or salvific²¹²—and the personal relation that make the objects into holy things that tend to ‘disappear’ in the piety.

Nonetheless, these potent visual and material objects at some point and for some time ‘stop working’ for the women when they encounter certain Reformed discourses and traditions. The synthesis, between objects and the sacred and between the women and their things, is ‘cracked’, and the things appear as objects whose “specificity is in doubt,” and the question is posed: what are these things?²¹³ A process of de-familiarization and disenchantment occurs.

²⁰⁹ See Andrew Louth, trans. and intro., *St John of Damascus, Three Treaties on the Divine Images*, Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003. See also Leonid Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon* volumes I and II, trans. Anthony Gythiel, Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1992.

²¹⁰ David Morgan, “Thing,” in *Material Religion*, vol.7, issue 1, p.142.

²¹¹ Bill Brown, “Thing Theory,” in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 28, No. 1, Things (2001), pp. 1–22, p.4.

²¹² The incarnational Orthodox view of Icons was established in the 8th century at the resolution of the iconoclastic period. An additional salvific value of images was introduced to the East by the Jesuit missionaries in the 19th century. Heyberger explains, “Les effets spirituels de la contemplation de l’image sont strictement encadrés dans le système latin des indulgences,” see Heyberger, *De l’Image Religieuse à l’Image Profane*, p.50.

²¹³ David Morgan, “Thing,” p. 142.

The women inherited certain established forms and familiar media that invoke the divine, and facilitate contact, yet those media look inappropriate within the Protestant context, as we shall explain, that seems to suggest a direct relation with God which can only be obstructed by things and objects.²¹⁴

Protestantism arrived in Lebanon at the beginning of the 19th century with American and later British missionaries.²¹⁵ Right from the start, these missionaries displayed a number of positions, all of which challenged—albeit in different ways—the presence of material objects,²¹⁶ particularly visual objects, in the piety of the Easterners. These various attitudes endure in contemporary Protestant circles. According to social norms,²¹⁷ the women considered here automatically join the very small Protestant Church upon marriage. Although this almost never entails conversion, many become with time active members in this Church, and each in her own way spontaneously engages with Reformed theological concepts. The various Protestant discourses, as well as the women’s own processing and interaction with Reformed theology, lead to cracking the synthesis both between God and the objects and between the women and their things. In what follows we will discuss these various streams and illustrate some of the cracks that result.

A confluence of Protestant Attitudes

When the Protestant missionaries of the 19th century glimpsed what Heyberger calls the “explosion” of imagery and devotional objects proliferated most intensely under Jesuit influence, they reacted strongly. In his book *The Women of the Arabs* written in the 1870s, Henry Jessup, a long-standing missionary in Lebanon, introduced Lebanese Christian women to his American readers, saying:

²¹⁴ Birgit Meyer, *Mediation and the Genesis of Presence*, p.26. See also Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts: The Protestant Image Question in Western and Eastern Europe*, London, NY: Routledge, 1993.

²¹⁵ See Habib Badr, “Evangelical Missions and Churches in the Middle East: Lebanon, Syria and Turkey,” in Habib Badr (ed.) *Christianity: A History in the Middle East* (Beirut: Middle East Council of Churches [MECC], 2005); Heleen Murre-van den Berg, (ed.), *New Faiths in Ancient Lands: Western Missions in the Middle East in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

²¹⁶ A position highlighted by Peter Pels, who accuses ‘occidental’- ‘Calvinism’ of feeding a “fear of matter” that still bears effect today; see Peter Pels, “The Modern Fear of Matter: Reflections on the Protestantism of Victorian Science” in *Material Religion* vol. 4, issue 3, pp. 264–283.

²¹⁷ Women in the Middle East are expected to join their husband’s religion or denomination. The children would then be baptized into the father’s church and the family would be considered as a whole—in this case, Protestant.

“The Syrian Christianity (...) is the lowest type of the religion of the Greek and Roman churches. Saint-worship and picture-worship are universal (...) a superstitious people, no Bibles, and no readers to read them, (...) pilgrimages and offerings to the shrines of reputed saints, (...) all these practices and many others (...) rendered the women of the nominal Christian sects of Syria almost as hopeless subjects of missionary labor as were their less favored Druze and Moslem sisters.”²¹⁸

This reaction²¹⁹ towards these devotional objects, places, and rituals continued in Protestant circles under two main guises. George Sabra, leading Lebanese Reformed theologian, classifies Lebanese Protestantism into two large categories that overlap sometimes in the same people.²²⁰ The first category is *Pietist Protestantism*, concerned with personal faith and conversion and relying on a ‘direct’ and intimate experience of God in one’s life and heart. The second is a more cultural form of Protestantism that inherited the enlightened modern values of the Western missionaries and sees the fulfillment of religious convictions in education and social involvement and a “rejection of superstition and irrationality.”²²¹ We will treat both forms separately in what follows.

We observe that for this Lebanese *Cultural Protestantism*, which is even today deeply affected by the discourse and mindset of modernity and the Enlightenment, the collections of things are objectionable for two main reasons. The first is that they fall under the category of *kitsch* (i.e., they are cheap and tasteless); the second is that they resist aesthetic dis-interestedness.²²² Not only do these objects resist disinterestedness, but they are on the contrary very ‘useful’. *Kitsch*, in the form of mass-produced, low-quality images and objects, triggers sentiments and emotions that are highly questionable for critics. It places

²¹⁸ Henry Jessup, *The Women of the Arabs* (The Project Gutenberg eBook, 2005), p. 47. For more on this approach see Heleen Murre-van Den Berg, “Simply by giving them Macaroni... Anti-Roman Catholic Polemics in Protestant Missions,” in Martin Tamcke and Michael Marten (eds.), *Christian Witness between Continuity and New Beginnings: Modern Historical Missions in the Middle East* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2006), pp. 63–80.

²¹⁹ Birgit Meyer identifies this attitude of classifying materially expressed religion as a lower kind in Freudian and Marxist discourses among others, see Meyer, *Mediation and the Genesis of Presence*, p.17.

²²⁰ George Sabra, *Fi Sabeel el Hiwar el Maskouni. Maqalat Lahoutiya Injiliya* (Towards the Ecumenical Dialog, Evangelical Theological Essays) (Beirut: Clarion Publishing House, 2001), p.105.

²²¹ George Sabra, ‘Fi Sabeel’, p.107.

²²² David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1998), p.26.

sentimentality at the heart of the religious experience,²²³ considering the Kantian division between sensuality and reason; reason and intellect being an important identity marker for Lebanese cultural Protestants.²²⁴ In addition, within the modern mentality, aesthetics is valued in as far as it remains a disinterested way of looking, where no need of the viewer is to be satisfied but rather a distance is to be fixed between viewer and objects.²²⁵

Somehow these ideals reflect, in the words of Robert Solomon, “the ‘high’ class of many societies” that “associate themselves with emotional control and reject sentimentality as an expression of inferior, ill-bred beings, (...) male society has long used such a view to demean the ‘emotionality’ of women.”²²⁶ This approach to esthetics and viewing of objects underlines the division of body and mind and assumes that we only know through our minds.²²⁷ It is therefore against this backdrop of division between body and mind, sentimentality and emotional control, desire and disinterestedness that we should understand the dismissal of material objects on the part of this cultural Protestantism. Desirée, having internalized this modern Protestant attitude, talks about her things, saying: “I have lots of Icons. I don’t believe in them. But I used to put them under the bed of my husband and my children. Rationally I don’t believe in them, but out of superstition, yes I do. They represent things to me...but my communication with God is direct; when I am in trouble I talk to Him.” Similarly, Tania explains in her biography that through discussions with some Protestant theologians, “I came to appreciate the rational approach to faith rather than the mystical and emotional...I came with time to embrace the beliefs of the Protestant Church and I learned about many misconceptions I had,” related mostly to material objects and rituals.

²²³ Robert C. Solomon, “On Kitsch and Sentimentality,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 49, no.1, 1991, pp.1–14.

²²⁴ This category of Protestants prides itself on the establishment of distinguished universities and schools and the promotion of classical music.

²²⁵ Kant himself understands “the experience of beauty ...incites no desire for a thing but enjoys only the representation in the mind,” Morgan, *Visual Piety*, p.26. See also William A. Dyrness, *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture, The Protestant Imagination from Calvin to Edwards* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

²²⁶ Robert C. Solomon, “On Kitsch and Sentimentality,” p. 9.

²²⁷ See Birgit Meyer and Jojada Verrips, “Aesthetics,” in David Morgan (ed.), *Key Words in Religion, Media, and Culture* (Routledge, 2008), pp. 20–30.

Pietist Protestantism, on the other hand, has no problem with emotions and desires triggered by objects and images. American and British Protestant piety²²⁸ in the 19th and 20th centuries was flourishing, particularly via its missionary apparatus, through visuals designed not only for pedagogical purposes²²⁹ but also emotional stimulation. Many art ‘schools’ developed in Protestant missionary societies for the development of missionary tracks and visual aids in the mission field. Moreover, David Morgan’s research on American visual piety discloses that numerous Protestant homes in America today have corners and walls adorned with images of Jesus designed especially for help in private devotion.²³⁰ Many German Protestant homes have the *Herrgottswinkle* or ‘God’s corner’,²³¹ found as well in Pennsylvanian German Protestant homes.

For *Pietist Protestantism*, the objection is therefore not in the first place towards the presence of objects, but to the particular content and use of these things in the ‘altars’. The disapproval is not so much, for example, against the use of the Jesuit ‘kitsch’ images of Jesus²³² that create and satisfy sentimentality, but rather the presence and use of images of saints and of the Virgin Mary, for instance. We mention here Soad, who affirms how she has “rejected all these things.” Coming from an Orthodox home herself, she explained during an interview:

“Look, I have these books. I have the hymn book and this, look, the Daily Bread. Look where I am now in reading it. I have read everything that is written in it from here to here. Here also are the Psalms—I read them every day. I have read the Psalms a hundred times. Is it good like this?”

These books rest on a table in a corner of her living room; above it Soad has hung a picture of her sons, a devotional calendar, and a cross. She added, “Some of my relatives ask me: did

²²⁸ Both influential in the formative years of the Lebanese Protestant Church.

²²⁹ Sandy Brewer, “From Darkest England to the Hope of the world: Protestant Pedagogy and the Visual Culture of the London Missionary Society,” in *Material Religion*, vol.1, issue1, pp. 98–123.

²³⁰ Such as Sallman’s Head of Christ, Christ knocking on Door, Jesus the good Shepherd, see David Brown, *Visual Piety*.

²³¹ Kay Turner, *Beautiful Necessity*, p.51.

²³² Those images, according to Heyberger, made according to human form, facilitate a dialogue between the pious and the figure that is more *quotidian* and more familiar than was possible with strict oriental Icons. Those images helped the pious to reach to the inside, while the Icon established contact with the external Holy. Heyberger, *De l’Image Religieuse à l’Image Profane*, p.51.

you forget about the *Rūm*?²³³ to emphasize how distant she is now from the objects of her mother tradition.

This confluence of attitudes ²³⁴ and “mentalist approach” to religion as Meyer calls it, clashes with the more incarnational Orthodox approach which values objects as revealing of God. It also clashes with the anthropological and material Maronite emphasis where human beings and the created world mediate the divine.²³⁵ This clash creates distance, defamiliarizes the objects and sometimes even demystifies them, or, in David Morgan’s words, causes a “disenchantment” with objects. In Stephanie’s evaluation, “these are not the things that will make a difference ultimately in our lives or in life after death.” This disenchantment makes the Icons look more like idols that demand to be re-classified,²³⁶ or iconoclastically destroyed. However, this defamiliarization and initial disenchantment, *liberating*²³⁷ as it can be, is always accompanied by a step of reconsideration or re-evaluation.

IV. RE-EVALUATION

Due to this ‘disenchantment’ encouraged within the Protestant context, the collections of things lose their charm and, in a sense, their power. What were once considered holy and sacred things become ‘merely’ (and even highly questionable) objects. Their presence becomes problematic and the women considered here feel compelled to redefine or eliminate them. Nevertheless, the women rarely, if ever, resort to ‘destroying’ or discarding them. On the contrary, many things are removed only to be brought back, or are exchanged for other kinds of things.

²³³ *Rūm* is the popular term for Antiochian Orthodox Church.

²³⁴ Referring here to some types of Protestantism rooted in 19th century Liberalism as well as Pietism, adding to it a Barthian influence on Lebanese Protestantism. Karl Barth, we are reminded, was “the twentieth-century theologian who has most rigorously denied that man can know God other than by God’s revelation of himself in Christ,” and who, despite his interest in art, is classified by some thinkers as “inflexibly iconoclastic.” See Michael Austin, *Exploration in Art, Theology and Imagination*, (London, Oakville: Equinox, 2005).

²³⁵ We are reminded here that the Maronite tradition prides itself on having an anthropological inclination, valuing the material world and human flesh in its theology. See Rima Nasrallah, *The Liturgies in the Antiochian Orthodox and Maronite Churches and their Implications on the Liturgy in the Reformed Church in Lebanon*, Master Thesis (VU Amsterdam, 2009). See Michel Hayek, *Liturgie Maronite. Histoire et Textes Eucharistiques* (Paris: Maison Mame, 1964).

²³⁶ “A thing is assigned a place in a taxonomy, and remains there until circumstances bid us to reassign it to another taxonomy,” David Morgan, “Thing,” p.142.

²³⁷ David Morgan uses this concept in relation to the liberating effect of iconoclasm. In David Morgan and Sally M. Promey (eds.), *The Visual Culture of American Religions* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 2001), p.14.

These women seem to be torn between two sensory modalities, as Birgit Meyer²³⁸ would put it: one more auditory and wordy; the other highly visual. One would feel that even if they were to decide to adopt completely Protestant attitudes towards material objects, they would still be unable to ‘shed’ entirely the ‘resilient’ old bodily disciplines.

But one would have to pause here and ask whether these women really *want* to rid themselves of things. We observe that, on the contrary, the process of ridding themselves from things and images, or distancing themselves from them, seems to be accompanied by great uncertainty about the necessity of such an act. In fact, in the process of evaluating the urge to get rid of these collections, the women realize that there is more at stake than ‘just’ material objects. Antoinette explains, for example: “Maybe it is the Protestant outlook that drove me away—God forgive me—from the statues and taught me the direct path to Him.” By adding “God forgive me,” Antoinette reflects a dilemma most women feel when faced with this situation.²³⁹

Having distanced themselves from these objects, the women tend to reconsider their new attitude towards objects, not only because these sensory modalities are resilient, as Meyer aptly remarked, but also because something sacred seems to be destroyed in the process and things have to return in one form or another to safeguard that sacred presence. Maybe, as David Morgan asserts, “enchantment is far too valuable to be rejected out of hand.”²⁴⁰ It is noteworthy, for instance, that all the women explained that even in situations when they do not actively seek to collect certain things (oil, water, Icons, etc.) from religious sites, if it is handed to them, they take it. In cases where the women do not have a use for the items, they are still kept respectfully because, in Fida’s words, “it is not right to throw them away.” She adds, “I have a lot of incense from several places and people, but I don’t cense. I don’t know what to do with them. I cannot throw them away—it’s irreverent.”

Furthermore, the fact that the women in this research do not leave one tradition to join another but keep both (or the three) traditions active and physically move between and in-

²³⁸ Birgit Meyer explains that “in situations of religious change, people may feel torn between the sensory modalities of the religion they embrace and that of the religion they have left behind.” See Birgit Meyer, *Religious Sensations*, p.25.

²³⁹ This formulation coincides with Bruno Latour’s observation as he describes the reaction of iconoclasts after destroying images; he says: “as if the destroyer (of images) had suddenly realized that something else had been destroyed by mistake, something for which atonement was now overdue.” See Bruno Latour, *What is Iconoclasm?* p.15.

²⁴⁰ James Elkins and David Morgan (eds.), *Re-Enchantment* (New York, London: Routledge, 2009), p.12.

between them, means that this process is continuous. We have discussed elsewhere that these women celebrate feasts, for example, in several churches. They could be present on Good Friday in an Antiochian Orthodox Church and on Easter Sunday in a Protestant Church. A month later they could go on a pilgrimage to a Maronite monastery and then participate soon after in a Protestant retreat. Throughout this zigzagging between denominations, they collect or gather sacred objects. However, these objects seem a liability once in a Protestant context. Distance is then taken from these objects. Still, after a while, these same objects could be reconsidered while some are discarded others are reinstated, and the cycle continues. As the attitudes change over time, the objects move around within the physical space and the liturgical frame of the women.

The women highlighted four areas of tension that have a particular bearing on their collections of things. Reflecting on this issue for the purpose of this research, the women mentioned the following themes inspired from Reformed Protestant principals as guiding motives for the evolution of their collections: 1. a direct relation with God, 2. Christ alone (*Solus Christus*), 3. the centrality of scripture, and 4. simplicity. However, these clear themes, upon closer inspection, are actually seen to be areas of tension that ‘shake’ the things and lead to unresolved ambiguity, as we shall explain.

Direct / Indirect

The term ‘direct’ figures in almost all reflections on the relationship between the women and God where we read or hear statements such as: ‘Direct’, ‘no need for an intermediary’, ‘no need for a particular place’, and ‘no need for rituals and things’; “Knock and it will be opened to you,” affirmed Eva. This stress on the direct and unmediated relationship with God is both embedded in a modernist Protestant discourse that values spirit over matter and mind over body, as well as Reformed theological dimensions. Personal and direct relation with God is primordial and normative for the women in question. When comparing her various traditions, Youmna said, “They are right, the Protestants. Their relationship is with Christ directly without intermediary. They follow the Gospel without other invented additions.” However, in her daily practice Youmna uses a rosary for prayer and addresses herself to an image of the Virgin Mary as she surrounds herself with many objects.

These many objects and (indirect) mediating practices are often not noticed by believers who are convinced that they have direct access to the divine. It is however remarkable in our case that the women in question are highly aware of this tension and waver between hope for direct access and struggling with indirect media as they keep reflecting upon and evaluating them. Having internalized the Protestant call for a direct relationship with God, the women are in a dilemma: it would seem to be “better, purer, faster access to God” to do without images, yet in practice they recognize that “we cannot do *without* images, intermediaries, mediators of all shapes and forms.”²⁴¹

Christ alone / a host of witnesses

“Only Christ can answer,” “Christ is the main,” “to him alone I pray,” are statements repeated throughout the interviews and biographies. This general Christo-centric Reformed assertion takes different shapes in the highly colorful altars. When asked directly, the women do not hesitate before establishing Christo-centricity. On a cognitive level they all seem to be convinced not only that Christ is the main but that Christ is the only object and subject of their worship activities. However, when looking at the altars, it is not Christ alone who figures. “I have a corner in the house,” describes Dana in her biography, “that has a statue of the Virgin Mary and Icons of Jesus and of the saints of Lebanon, Charbel, Rafqa, and Hardini. The candle is always lit in front of the statue in my house.” Jesus rarely stands alone in the home altars and collections. Yet this necessity of ‘Christ alone’ stifles the collections, as the women try to reshape and rearrange by adding as many Christ-related images as possible, by eliminating some items if the connection with Christ is not very clear, or by arranging the order of the display so that Christ images are most prominent.

For some, this discrepancy creates embarrassment. Jeanette explained, “I received an Icon two years ago, it is of the Virgin Mary. So now I have fixed it on the wall, but it does not receive very special attention in our home. The Bible receives more attention in my life nowadays.”

²⁴¹ Bruno Latour, *What is Iconoclasm?* p.14.

"I am happy to hold a Bible in my hands," explained Jeanette, "I am happy with the relationship I have with the Bible now." Upon joining the Protestant Church, the Bible immediately acquires a new place in the piety and life of the women. "Before I did not learn anything from the Bible," said Fida. Antoinette couldn't over-emphasize: "the Gospel, the Gospel, the Gospel: it is the most important thing," she affirmed. Many women said that they keep a Gospel next to their bed, or somewhere around their sleeping area. It is unmistakably a cherished object whose value and content are emphasized in the Protestant Church. The tension between what the Bible says about things, objects, statues, altars, and the collections of things, is also sharply clear in the minds of the women. "The Old Testament says God is a jealous God—he is jealous. I have to focus on Jesus, on the Word," explained Antoinette. "This is why now they [the images] are present very much— they are all around. Look on the piano, whatever I see I bring...but now it means more to me when I read the word, I feel that he is with me."

The Bible is spoken of as that which is the pure, right, and clear way to God, as opposed to all other *things*. Yet adding the physical Bible, as a book-object, to the collection of things seems by itself to redeem the collection and confer to it by 'contamination' a certain Protestant validity. On the other hand, the collection is not independent of the Bible but defined by it, by its presence as a symbol. All these things which have been gathered or distributed are understood to be connected to the Bible, to Biblical stories, words and concepts, and thus are not totally unacceptable. Although for some thinkers "words and things have long been considered deadly rivals,"²⁴² adding the Bible to the collection of things and giving it a prominent place levels the words and things: by making the things words, and the Bible a thing, they can coexist together. Yet still the tension between them cannot disappear.

²⁴² Bill Brown, *Thing Theory*, p.11.

Simplicity / Excess

The discourse on simplicity and excess in the altars is recurrent. Simplicity is connected in the minds of the women with Protestant theology and is used as a criterion to evaluate the ‘aesthetic’ validity of the things. Over-adorned Icons, shiny or pearled and jeweled objects seem to contradict, in the logic of the women, the Protestant faith, while non-glossy, old, and simple images and objects seem to be more acceptable.

Everything in the Protestant Church, from its buildings to its theology, passing by its liturgy, is considered by the women to be *simple*. In this way, ‘simple’ becomes a measuring rod. “In the Protestant Church there is more simplicity,” explained Youmna. “For example you see the bishop in the other churches wearing a cross ‘this big’ and a chain ‘this big’—all outward manifestation...but Jesus was not like that. He called for simplicity and humility.” She adds, “The Protestant believers are also simple and humble, not just the church. They have no excess, not showing off all the time.” Desirée explained, “I mean, things are modest [in the Protestant Church]...people are simple...I personally feel ashamed when I wear something very expensive...I am ashamed of showing off...” Simplicity is also one of Leena’s criteria for her icons; they should not be glossy or too colorful, nor framed and covered with silver. For others, simplicity means the number of objects and images displayed, and for others still the size of the objects. Texture and quality seem to be ‘theologically’ important. “I have put over the dining room door a picture of the Virgin I brought from Saydnaya.²⁴³ Really it is on a wooden board, something simple. A simple wood,” described Nada. Excess does not match with the Christian faith for the women in question. “How can you have all these ornate and expensive things when the poor are at your doorstep?” Youmna questioned the clergy in her mother church rhetorically. Excess is considered ethically incorrect, and non-Christ like. Yet again, as in the previous cases, excess and simplicity coexist and struggle with each other inside the collections and the home altars.

In sum, the things in the collections of these women are not settled. These things are challenged by a confluence of attitudes and embody a continuous struggle between

²⁴³ Saydnaya is a Greek/Antiochian Orthodox monastery and popular pilgrimage site in Syria.

concepts and objects and interpretations that causes them to have ‘cracks’. They are moving and being reclassified thus never to solidify or totally ‘disappear’ again.

V. SHIFTING AND RE-CENTERING

It is the continuous movement of these collections that strikes us here. The objects and images keep acquiring a new physical location as well as a new theological meaning. It is our thesis that it is in this movement and uncertainty that these objects address the women and draw attention towards something beyond them.²⁴⁴

We saw how Leena’s altar described in the introduction is still changing and moving. In the case of Antoinette, we observed the same. Antoinette had no delineated home altar during our first visit but simply a large collection of items spread around her house. “From the Funeral of Jesus (in the Orthodox Church) I bring flowers, and from Palm Sunday olive branches,” she explained. “I display them—together with the objects brought from the Funeral of Jesus—I bring them and distribute them in the house...behind my pillow I put all the pictures of the saints and the gospel and pictures of saints in the pillows of the children...and inside the cupboards in the kitchen.” An altar and its centerpiece, a statue of the Virgin Mary, has now been placed over a high cupboard. “Although—I swear to God—having an altar was very important to me,” she added, “now, I don’t know. Maybe I should bring back the altar, maybe I could set it up on the balcony...though maybe it is the Protestant outlook that drove me away...”

Ambiguity and theological tensions keep these altars moving and prevent them from fossilizing and stagnating, and therefore becoming inactive. As we mentioned before, many scholars explain how liturgical or ritual objects can become invisible when not questioned.²⁴⁵ Instead of addressing the onlooker or user, they merge into the background and confirm the status-quo. On the other hand, objects and visuals that keep moving and flowing gain an ever-renewed meaning and address the user by their ambiguity.

²⁴⁴ We are inspired here by Bruno Latour’s freeze-framing concept where he proposes a re-reading of the second commandment of the forbidden worship of images: “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below,” (Exodus 20:4). He proposes instead to understand this commandment as “Thou shall not freeze-frame any graven image.” Bruno Latour, *What is Iconoclasm?* p.37. Freeze-framing is “extracting an image out of the flow, and becoming fascinated by it, as if it were sufficient, as if all movement had stopped,” Bruno Latour, *What is Iconoclasm?*, p.26.

²⁴⁵ See Birgit Meyer, Bill Brown, and Bruno Latour.

In our case, we see that the women seem to refuse (or are unable) to decide whether these objects are just human-made constructions, thus worthless and dispensable, or holy and untouchable.²⁴⁶ It is this indecision and oscillating attitudes that ‘damage’ the things in their initial state. By this we mean that they are ‘broken,’ in the sense that they do not stand solid and unquestioned but have ‘cracks’²⁴⁷ in them. These cracks allow the women to look beyond the objects and ask questions about modes of presence of the divine. The attention is thus directed away from the objects and towards presence.²⁴⁸

This shifting and re-centering makes the objects work. If consecration is the prerequisite to “making images work”²⁴⁹ in traditional Orthodoxy, shifting them and de-centering them is what makes them work here, but in a different way. Many women explained, for example, how the Orthodox priests stopped visiting them to perform the Liturgy of the Lesser Water or the rite of the consecration of the Icons in their homes upon hearing about their marriage into the Protestant Church.²⁵⁰ However, this rather disappointing fact does not affect the ‘activity’ of the collections. On the contrary, it is our thesis that this situation of uncertainty that causes the women to keep moving their objects and take different and changing positions towards them is the reason behind this new sort of activity in the collections. Rather than imbuing them with certainty of life and efficacy, this situation shakes them with the ambiguity of both presence and absence, construction and truth.

The accidental confluences of currents in the liturgical lives of the women and the particular addition of the Protestant attitude of what Peter Pels calls “fear of matter”²⁵¹ create a situation where shifting and re-centering occurs. Things thus keep confronting the

²⁴⁶ W. J. T. Mitchell calls this a “double consciousness” towards images, “vacillating from magical beliefs and skeptical doubts, naïve animism and hardhead materialism, mystical and critical attitudes,” in W. J. T. Mitchell, *What do Images Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), p.7.

²⁴⁷ See note 7.

²⁴⁸ See Bruno Latour. See also Milicia Bakic-Hayden’s discussion on ambivalence in Icons that opens up to *Theosis*, Milicia Bakic-Hayden, “The Aesthetics of Theosis: Uncovering the Beauty of the Image,” in Wil van den Bercken and Jonathan Sutton (eds.), *Aesthetics as a Religious Factor in Eastern and Western Christianity*, Eastern Christian Studies 6 (Leuven, Paris, Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2005), pp.24–36.

²⁴⁹ David Freedberg, *The power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press), p.82.

²⁵⁰ We keep in mind that a relationship of distrust persists between most Eastern churches and the Protestants since the time of the 19th century Protestant missionary activity, despite all the ecumenical rapprochement of the last 30 years.

²⁵¹ See Peter Pels, “The Modern Fear of Matter.”

women with their un-specificity and yet retain their power to *express* and *connect*, and to direct the attention away from the object to what is beyond.

VI. ACTIVE OBJECTS

It is our thesis, consequently, that these things are (re)made active through shifting and re-centering, through shaking. Objects in general are potent; they even talk.²⁵² According to Sheryl Turkle, “objects help us make our minds, reaching out to us to form active partnerships.”²⁵³ Yet we consider that these particular collections have their own potency in their brokenness and movement. And it is in this particular aspect that we will be looking at them. In the liturgical lives of these women, they become their theology,²⁵⁴ they make God present, they form the women, and they create connections.

The flowing objects are theology

The objects featuring in the loose collections or organized altars of the women are classically tools for worship and ritual. However, in this article we have attempted to focus on the objects themselves, their presence, removal, and movement separate from their ritual use,²⁵⁵ as we believe that ‘matter matters’. These collections of things in their *nature*, their *shape*, and their *quality* are theologies spontaneously made by these women. It is in their movement and shape that we see the women’s ‘reasoning’ about important doctrinal concepts, not in words and reflective actions but by redefining their relations to certain objects and the place they occupy in their life(ves).

Hence the first remark that we can make about the theologies of the women seen in their collections is that these theologies are flowing, changing, or shifting. This ambiguous and flowing nature of the collections is the place where we see adaptable theologies tolerant to tension. The fact that they are not fixed—things are brought, removed, reconsidered, or added all the time—protects the women from fundamentalism²⁵⁶ by fixation.

²⁵² Particularly in their ambivalence. See Lorraine Datson (ed.), *Things That Talk: Object Lessons from Art and Science* (New York: Zone Books, 2004).

²⁵³ Sherry Turkle (ed.), *Evocative Objects: Things we Think With*, (Cambridge, London: MIT Press, 2007), p.308.

²⁵⁴ Theology is understood as pondering, reasoning, and discussing God.

²⁵⁵ This we will discuss in a subsequent article.

²⁵⁶ Marcel Barnard, ‘Ambivalent Images’ p.69.

These literally ‘hand-made’ theologies take several shapes in the various arrangements of the collections. Every woman forms her theology by her selection of objects, by what she leaves out, and what she places at the center or at the top. The fact that most of these arrangements keep changing form and display is a sign that these theologies are always in the making, but also that God is not understood as static but as dynamic and involved.²⁵⁷ Snapshots of the particular arrangement of some collections taken at a certain point give an idea of one phase of the development or movement of these theologies, but are never conclusive.

Not only is the nature and form of the collections ‘theology,’ but so is the quality of the objects. We discussed earlier how the contrast between ‘glossy’ and simple objects, for example, acquired theological meaning. The theology is ‘written’ or formed with objects which, in their quality, define who God is and how God works—be it objects from nature, aesthetic objects, objects related to healing, objects of intimacy, etc. In these changing *bricolages*, the women allow for a multifaceted active God who has simultaneously different images or who change throughout one’s life. He can be at the same time Holy and Other in Orthodox Icons,²⁵⁸ as well as feminine, human, and tender in images of the sacred heart²⁵⁹ and / or also a crucified savior testified to in a displayed Bible.²⁶⁰ Latour reminds us that “if the medium is the message, slightly different types of media (and mediation) will produce enormous differences in types of messages.”²⁶¹ If the arrangements the women make, and the quality and selection of objects is always changing, it is also the message, the theology that is changing; it is fluid, elastic, present, and active.

The ‘broken’ objects make God present in a paradoxical way

We advance that the objects allow God’s presence for two reasons: First because they are media thus understood as holding their referent within them (Meyer, Morgan, Latour).

²⁵⁷ See more on movement and Sacramentality in David Brown and Ann Loades (eds), *The Sense of the Sacramental: Movement and Measure in Art, Music, Place and Time* (London: SPCK, 1995).

²⁵⁸ A sharp distinction is drawn between the depiction of Christ in early Oriental Icons and that introduced by Latin missionaries. See Heyberger in *De L’image Religieuse à L’image Profane* p.41.

²⁵⁹ See David Morgan, *The Sacred Heart of Jesus: The Visual Evolution of a Devotion*, Meertens Ethnology Cahier 4, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008).

²⁶⁰ The ‘Christological point of contention’, the varying images of Jesus (see Brinkman, *Jesus Incognito*, p.16), sometimes sit together in one altar or occupy it successively.

²⁶¹ Bruno Latour, *How to be Iconophilic*, p.424.

Second, in a sacramental way because of their brokenness and uncertainty by presenting an interplay of presence and absence.²⁶²

In a first step, “*sensational forms*...make the transcendental sense-able,”²⁶³ as Meyer says; “they effect or make present what they mediate.”²⁶⁴ This is even more true since most of the objects are pictures, as they make the divine present in a more visual way. David Morgan, commenting on pictures of Jesus, says, “the picture is taken as a medium that generates the spiritual presence of Jesus through a mutual gaze of seeing and being seen.”²⁶⁵

However, we want to go one step further. In the experience of the women we are considering, presence is not automatic and unquestioned. The synthesis between God and the objects, as we explained earlier, is cracked. God is not essentially, incarnationally, or salvifically merged with the objects. The objects are superfluous and optional for God; Christ is everywhere in the conviction of these women and does not need objects. But still, the women would propose, God can be ‘seen’ in these objects. It is in the uncertainty and ‘optionality’ that God is present for the women, rather than in the certainty and familiarity of the medium. “It is not that I pray in front of the things,” explained Najat, “I stand next to them and I pray, I look, I stand.” The women try not to trap God’s presence in the objects, yet He is there. It is in the cracks, the brokenness of the objects that God seems to be simultaneously present and absent. These material objects, these “ordinary everyday matters can also be as meaningless as always and nevertheless offer a view of something else.”²⁶⁶ The cracks then function in a sacramental way.

Shaken objects form certain subjects

These objects do not only “organize vertical encounters of religious subjects with the transcendental” but they also “induce a particular sense of the self and one’s being in the world—if you wish a particular identity,”²⁶⁷ says Meyer. In addition we have to take into

²⁶² An understanding of sacramentality based on the theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, Trans. P. Madigan and M. Beaumont (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1995).

²⁶³ Birgit Meyer, *Religious Sensations*, p.8.

²⁶⁴ Birgit Meyer, *Mediation and the Genesis of Presence*, p.26.

²⁶⁵ David Morgan, *Visual Piety*, p.7

²⁶⁶ Martien Brinkman, *Jesus Incognito*, p.43.

²⁶⁷ Birgit Meyer, *Religious Sensations*, p.21.

consideration that “we construct images, but images also construct us.”²⁶⁸ The particular moving, broken collections we have been discussing have their own way of forming selves as well.

The women experience with all their senses the texture, smell, colors, and taste of their objects, which both enchant and disturb them. They enchant them with their beauty and holiness yet disturb them with their ‘profanity’. It is this unease that forms the subjects, who have to make many decisions concerning the most ‘trivial’ of things: the women intuitively have to answer the questions: What should I do with the objects? Which objects? Where and how should I put them? Neither the church nor the tradition—or even their mothers—can be of great help; each has something very different to say. They are thus forced to be ‘present,’ not as spectators or users, but totally present in the face of another presence (or absence). All this creates agency,²⁶⁹ responsibility, and ownership.

Shaken objects create connections

Kay Turner emphasizes that in a home altar a woman “assembles a highly condensed, symbolic model of connection by bringing together sacred images and ritual objects, pictures, mementos, natural materials, and decorative effects which represent different realms of meaning and experience—heaven and earth, family and deities, nature and culture, Self and Other.”²⁷⁰ In the case of the women in this research, we see this “symbolic model of connection” as well. In the collections, connections are established between all the aspects of one’s life and between the various traditions the women belong to.

Besides connecting the women to God and God to the women as we have seen, the objects of their collections help them achieve other connections. They connect, for example, the past and the present by bringing objects from the past in contact with elements from the present. They also connect people in the lives of the women, as well as relate the living to the dead. Antoinette pointed to a picture of the Virgin Mary hanging on the wall: “This is from the house of my grandfather on my father’s side—God rests his soul. My uncle used to say she is miraculous.” Over a corner of that picture Antoinette has pasted a picture of her children.

²⁶⁸ Martien Brinkman, *Jesus Incognito*, p.51.

²⁶⁹ It is proposed that home altar-making gives women agency in Eastern Churches in general. See Dorothy C. Weaver, “Shifting Agency: Male Clergy, Female Believers, and the Role of Icons,” in *Material Religion*, 7 (3), pp.394–419.

²⁷⁰ Kay Turner, *Beautiful Necessity*, p.27.

Rana also explained, “We have a place, I will show you if you want, where we have placed the picture of my father—God rest his soul,—the picture of my husband’s deceased mother, and statues [of the Virgin] the kids have chosen from visits to Harissa.” Children, grandchildren, departed parents, and grandparents connect through holy things in these collections. In a sense, this connecting of images, as Morgan says, also “help create and organize memory.”²⁷¹

They more particularly connect the women to people in their lives. Many of the items in the collections are gifts from family members and friends and, as Marcel Mauss says, “gifts retain something of their givers.”²⁷² They are also connected to certain events. Nada recounted, “Rami my son went to play football in Jordan, and if you remember, there was this big explosion in the hotel where they were supposed to be. Miraculously they were spared. He brought me an Icon of the Virgin Mary from there and I hang it in my room.” Other Icons and objects connect the women to weddings, baptisms, feasts, funerals, medical operations, etc. They also connect the women spatially with all the different places that are important to them. Najat explained, “I visit places and experience something and collect. Now what should I do with these things? I put them in the aquarium...this thing reminds me of this place and that one reminds me of that...”

In the same way Meyer explains that “to many people, religious sensory regimes allow them to make sense of—and regain their senses in—our increasingly fragmented and distracted world.”²⁷³ This is something that is even more needed when one’s religious liturgical world is itself fragmented, and the collections of “sensory regimes” are cracked. However, despite their cracks, these collections manage to connect the various traditions of the women, as objects from the different churches are placed together, become defined by each other and challenge each other. They become one collection, where a van Dyke²⁷⁴ Bible can sit next to a statue of the Virgin Mary from a Maronite church, and a bag of holy oil from an Orthodox Monastery. They connect, despite the cracks, to make of the liturgical lives of the women wholes—integral, even if shaken.

271 David Morgan and Sally M. Promey (eds.), *The Visual Culture of American Religions*.

272 Sherry Turkle, *Evocative Objects*, p.312.

273 Birgit Meyer, *Religious Sensations*, inaugural, p.23.

274 The van Dyke Bible is the oldest and most widely used Lebanese Protestant Bible translation.

VII. CONCLUSION

Although the Jesuits fixed their images and objects with nails and hammers and the Protestant missionaries wanted to remove them completely, we see in the liturgical processing of these women a situation where the nails are removed, but not the images themselves; they are rearranged. Those images and things that still upset many Reformed onlookers are not fixed anymore, nor are they nailed to the piety. On the contrary, they flow. In the encounter between a Protestant and an Eastern Christian discourse, things can suffer but do not disappear. The women thus become “friends of holy things,”²⁷⁵ cooperating with them to continuously write their theologies and make sense of their rich and colorful religious world.

²⁷⁵ In the same sense as Miguel Tamen’s *Friends of interpretable objects*, See Miguel Tamen, *Friends of Interpretable Objects*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 2001).



Censing the House

Frame taken from video: R. Nasrallah

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Chapter 5: Kinesthetic Piety

Eastern Christian women's varying practices in Protestant homes

I. Introduction

Mona is an exemplary Church member in a Lebanese Protestant Church. She is faithful in attending and participating in the church services. She is a big supporter of the Sunday School and a member in the ladies' group where she led few times the Bible meditations. It is understandable therefore that I was a bit surprised when I discovered recently that Mona is an Eastern Orthodox Christian. Visiting her in her home for the purpose of this research I was only confirmed in her full and total embracing of the Protestant faith as she discussed the latest sermon, quoted from the Bible and talked about her faith. An hour and a half into the interview I told Mona how I discovered that she was Antiochian (Greek/Rūm) Orthodox. "Layla told me that you often come to her house to cense it", I said. Instantly, Mona stood up and led me to her kitchen. From there on a whole other facet of Mona's spirituality unfolded. Opening a kitchen cupboard she took out a cupper censor and guided me, past her Protestant husband, through a complex set of home rituals. Enveloped by a cloud of incense, I tasted sweet bread from the Orthodox Church, unwrapped little sachets containing holy oil, sampled blessed water, and witnessed ceremonial lighting of candles and visiting of icons.

Slightly embarrassed at this performance in the presence of a Protestant theologian, Mona exclaimed "I do not know why I do this". In this paper we focus on the everyday practices²⁷⁶

²⁷⁶ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by Steven Randall, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1988). Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, Translated by Richard Nice, (Cambridge : Polity Press, 1990). Lynda Sexson, *Ordinarly Sacred: Studies in Religion and Culture*, (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1992); Maaïke de Haardt, *Raam op het Zuiden. Religie en spiritualiteit in het alledaagse*, (Zoetermeer : Uitgeverij Meinema, 2013) ; Maaïke de Haardt and Anne-Marie Korte (eds.). *Common Bodies : everyday practices, gender and religion*, Munster : (LIT Verlag, 2002); Angela Berlis and Anne-Marie Korte (eds.). *Alledaags en Buitengewoon : Spiritualiteit in vrouwendomeinen*, (Vugt: Skandalon, 2002) ; Bonnie Miller-McLemore, *Christian Theology in Practice. Discovering a Discipline*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012); Bonnie Miller-McLemore, 'Embodied Knowing, Embodied Theology : What Happened to the Body?' in *Pastoral Psychology* (2013) 62:743-758;

of women like Mona: Lebanese women who come from Antiochian Orthodox²⁷⁷ or Maronite Churches²⁷⁸ and who by marriage join the Lebanese Protestant Churches²⁷⁹. We look at what these women do in the privacy of their home in order to honor, beseech and reach out to the Divine. We try to understand what these activities are, how they relate to each other and we attempt to frame them theologically.

An invisible aspect of the spiritual life of believers unfolds in the privacy of the home and in the rhythm of the everyday. "Throughout Christian history" Susan J. White explains "the household has been a significant sphere of liturgical activity for women"²⁸⁰. Catholic liturgical books, Eastern Orthodox household manuals, and Protestant advice books and devotionals have guided women's domestic piety²⁸¹ since at least the Middle Ages. Traditions related to fasting, feasting²⁸², or erecting shrines²⁸³ have been handed down from mother to daughter spontaneously. However, it is only recently that historians, sociologist and even theologians have started to look at the home as a valuable field of (theological) investigation²⁸⁴. Granting that private and public are not sharply delineated²⁸⁵ but rather flow into each other and interfere with each other, we choose here to look only at what happens inside the walls of one's home.

Barbara J. McClure, 'Divining the Sacred in the Modern World: Ritual and the Relational Embodiment of Spirit' in *Pastoral Psychology* 62 (2013), pp. 727-742.

²⁷⁷ George Atiyeh, 'The Rise of Eastern Churches', in Habib Badr (ed.), *Christianity: A History in the Middle East* (Beirut: Middle East Council of Churches, 2005), pp. 293-216; Hanna Hunt, 'Byzantine Christianity' in Ken Perry (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity*, (Oxford: Blackwell publishing Ltd, 2007), pp. 73-93.

²⁷⁸ Emma Loosley, Anthony O'Mahony, *Eastern Christianity in the Modern Middle East*, eBook, London: Routledge, 2010; Peter Galadza, 'Eastern Catholic Christianity' in Ken Perry (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity*, pp.291-318.

²⁷⁹ Heleen Murre-van den Berg, (ed.), *New Faiths in Ancient Lands: Western Missions in the Middle East in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Habib Badr, 'Evangelical Missions and Churches in the Middle East: Lebanon, Syria and Turkey' in Habib Badr (ed.) *Christianity: A History in the Middle East*, (Beirut: Middle East Council of Churches [MECC], 2005), pp.713-726; Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven, American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2008).

²⁸⁰ Susan J. White, *A History of Women in Christian Worship*, (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2003), p.201.

²⁸¹ Susan J. White, *A History of Women*, pp.201-241.

²⁸² More on this in Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1988).

²⁸³ Kay Turner, *Beautiful Necessity: The Art and Meaning of Women's Altars* (New York: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 1999).

²⁸⁴ See Maaïke de Haardt, *Raam op het Zuiden*.

²⁸⁵ David Frankfurter, 'The Interpenetration of Ritual Spaces in Late Antique Religions: An Overview' in *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 10 (2008), pp.199-210; Susan J. White, *A History of Women*, p.201.

We start this paper by introducing the women and depicting scenes from their homes. We then attempt to frame their complex practices within the field of ritual studies. We propose to consider them in their totality –rather than get halted by their details– as kinesthetic practices of piety. We undertake hereon to see how these practices in their physicality contribute to alternative ways of knowing the Divine in a theological context where visible inconsistencies lead to variations in practices.

II. The Intriguing Banal

We look in this paper at the everyday spiritual life of twenty seven Lebanese women who live in a particular and complex liturgical construction. We base ourselves on our empirical study where ethnographic methods were used between 2009 and 2013. Intermittent periods of participant observation combined with in depth interviews and filming were complemented by faith biographies written by the women in question for the purpose of this research. In other articles we have described and explained how the liturgical lives of the women become fluid liturgical scapes characterized by experimentation and movement²⁸⁶. We described and analyzed their feasting experiences²⁸⁷, their ‘pilgrimage’ practices²⁸⁸ and their relation to the various traditions. Resisting the either/or situation where they would be expected to choose only one of the many liturgical traditions, the women tend to move between the different Churches available. They combine and reshuffle practices and concepts often by assigning to them new and changing meanings. Living in Protestant homes and enthusiastically embracing much of the Protestant faith, the women find themselves continuously revisiting theological concepts and reinterpreting them. In this article, we focus on the practices of faith within the homes.

²⁸⁶ Rima Nasrallah and Marcel Barnard, ‘Taking Liberties: The fluid liturgical lives of Orthodox and Maronite women within the Protestant Church in Lebanon’ in *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 65(1-2) (2013), pp. 97-119.

²⁸⁷ Rima Nasrallah, Martien E. Brinkman, Heleen Murre-van den Berg and Marcel Barnard, ‘Itinerant Feasting: Eastern Christian Women Negotiating (Physical) Presence in the Celebration of Easter’ in *Exchange*, 42 (2013) pp. 319-342.

²⁸⁸ Rima Nasrallah, Heleen Murre-van den Berg and Marcel Barnard, ‘Kinetics of Healing: Protestant Women Pledging Baptism in Saydnaya Orthodox Monastery’ in *Studia Liturgica* 42/1-2 (2012), pp. 277-284.

Inside the Homes

Pastoral theologian Bonnie Miller-McLemore points out that mistakenly “when people think of the spiritual life, they typically picture silence, uninterrupted and serene – a pastor’s study, a cloister walk, a monk’s cell... the life of faith requires focused attention that comes most easily when one is least distracted...”²⁸⁹. The idea of Quiet Time is what comes first to mind in Protestant or Evangelical circles when one thinks of private devotion which most commonly consists of silence, reading the Bible and meditating.

However, in the case of the women considered ‘private devotion’ looks different. What characterizes the home piety of these women in particular is physical action – they are “persons-in-action”²⁹⁰ as Ronald Grimes puts it– as well as an intensified use of the senses. At first sight, the practices and rituals appear to emerge from an antique past. A time that does not correspond with the technological and emancipated world to which these women belong and in which they fully participate as educated working women. However, these women select and adapt available practices and add to them new ones as offered by the contemporary and changing global society.

Their liturgical lives are made up of some regular repetitive actions and some that are circumstantial and occasional. Some actions are practiced ceremonially and others are non-stylized and done very mundanely. It is therefore difficult to classify all that happens into categories. It is even more difficult to fully describe all that is done in the homes. We will therefore highlight ‘scenes’ from the complex lives of these women as we have witnessed them. The ‘scenes’ remain incomplete and give only a glimpse of what is happening.

Lara’s Sundays

Lara walked out to the balcony. There, in a cupboard full of odds and ends, she keeps her cupper censor. For the sake of this research, Lara had agreed to perform her censuring ritual, and like every Sunday morning she fetched the censor and placed it on the kitchen counter. She opened the cupboard under the kitchen sink and retrieved her glass jar stuffed to the brim with tiny plastic and paper bags of incense. They are collected from various monasteries and pilgrimage sites. Extracting one of the bags, Lara emptied its content on a

²⁸⁹ Quoted in McClure, *Divining the Sacred*, p.729.

²⁹⁰ Ronald Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, (Lanham, London: University Press of America, 1982).

sheet on the counter and with the bottom of the glass jar she started grinding the incense. "When they are a finer powder they make more smoke" she clarified. A roll of finely shaped coal was unwrapped and holding one piece with tongs, she aimed her lighter at it. The incense, now powder, was placed in the censor, the burning coal was jabbed on top and more powder was sprinkled on it, till a satisfactory cloud of smoke started. Lara picked up her censor and walked towards her starting station: a wall at the entrance mounted with the picture of Jesus. Under it, on a low cupboard, she had a framed photo of a deceased brother-in-law pinned at the corner with a picture of a local beatified priest, 'Abouna Ya'cob'. Lara, crossed herself and looked at the picture of Jesus. She swiveled her incense burner in circles in front of it so the puff of smoke stroked the entire surface of the picture, then she moved to the outside gate of her apartment. She thrust the incense burner between the bars of its grid, in and out of the grid three times, "so that no evil enters my house" she explained. Turning towards the main door, she censed a calligraphic Bible verse hanging on its post. Lara then proceeded to cense every single room in the house. Hand stretched holding the censor, she walked towards every corner in every room. In her son's room she lingered over his bed and his pillow, swiveling the censor in circles and then passing it over his toys on the shelf. Crossing the little boy in the corridor she placed the censor on his head and explained that normally she would cense her husband as well. "While I am walking around, I silently recite the Lord's prayer and the Hail Mary", she explained. "I don't pray the Rosary anymore like I used to, but I say the same prayers while censuring". Her red colored Rosary, fragrant of rose water, is stored in a bedside drawer. The censuring ended in front of the picture of Jesus once more, where one candle is lit for Jesus and one in front of the photo of the brother in law. The censor is placed there till it dies out, filling the house with smoke and fragrance before it is returned to rest on the balcony.

Antoinette's kitchen

It was Christmas, everywhere one looks red and gold objects are jangling. Antoinette rushed out of her kitchen, past her decorated and brightly lit Christmas tree, holding a tray with beautifully adorned truffles and chocolate squares, "I made them myself for the feast" she said "you should taste them." She then grabbed a handful and stuffed it in my purse, "it's a blessing" she said. At Easter time, Antoinette packed the same amount of her home made

traditional *Maamoul*²⁹¹ for me to take home, “a blessing”. Making the *Maamoul* takes hours and requires particular conditions and ingredients. Sometimes she gathers with few other women, sisters and neighbors, to make them together in her kitchen. The TV is turned on, tuned to *TéléLumière*, an Ecumenical Christian broadcasting station, and the tunes of Orthodox chanting followed by Maronite Choir performances drift in from the living room. The bowls in which the dough is to be made are tipped over a burning censor, and only after they are awash with smoke can the kneading start. Rose water brought from a monastery in the mountains is added to the dough. After hours of resting, the dough can start getting filled and shaped into long ovals like the tomb of Jesus, spherical domes like the rock, or donut shaped cookies like the crown of thorns. “I make wheat for the feast of Barbara, *Ouaymeet* and *Maakroun*²⁹² for the feast of Epiphany” she explained “and I plant grains to put next to the Christmas tree”. Antoinette fasts only during lent but does not impose the fast on the rest of her family. She abstains from eating meat as much as she can, though not regularly and not on Wednesdays and Fridays anymore. “I pray while I am cooking” underlined Antoinette while fiddling with her Virgin Mary gold pendant. “I have pictures of Saints in the kitchen closets... and when I light a candle, I light it in the kitchen”.

Fida’s hands

Fida took out a folded napkin from her purse, inside it she had three pieces of *Qurban* (sweet bread) that she had brought with her from the Orthodox Church next door. As her young granddaughter shows up in the room, Fida stuffs one of the squares into the little girl’s mouth who habitually opened her mouth to chew on the sweet bread. Fida explained that she brings *Qurban* (*antidoron*²⁹³) every time she attends the liturgy in the Orthodox Church, which is every Wednesday evening. But she also takes few extra pieces of bread from the communion tray when the Protestant Church celebrates the Lord’s Supper. “I take few cubes and put them in my napkin to share at home with those who did not come” she explained. But the bread is not always consumed and it sometimes dries up in her purse and

²⁹¹ Maamoul are cookies made for Easter (Muslims also make them in Ramadan) with semolina and stuffed with walnuts, pistachios or dates.

²⁹² Syrup coated cookies made for these feasts.

²⁹³ Antidoron is blessed but not consecrated sweet leavened bread distributed in Orthodox Churches after the Divine Liturgy, Arab Christians refer to it simply as *Qurban*. The Lebanese Protestant Church uses the exact same kind of sweet bread for the Lord’s Supper creating sometimes a (theological) confusion or overlap as the Lord’s Supper bread physically resembles the antidoron rather than the prosphoron (Eucharist).

crumbles mixing with its contents. Fida showed a flask of consecrated oil a friend had brought back from a monastery. She reached out for her smart phone and flipped through her whatsapps to show the picture of the monastery that her friend had visited. Holding a cotton swab she pours enough oil on it and then wipes it on the forehead of the little girl. The cotton is brushed vertically and then horizontally making an invisible oily cross on the skin. She then takes the hands of the girl and repeats the same movements on their backs while mumbling incomprehensibly. “If I have some oil left, I use it for cooking” she added “I don’t like to throw it away”.

III. The women’s practices

Every woman from those considered had a different combination of practices that she discussed or showed. Some were elaborate and others were very basic. The pool from which the practices are fished is the same: an accumulation of religious and cultural practices in a very religious East with a diverse corps of Christian traditions. Though many of the practices are indigenously Eastern, some were brought or changed by the Latin and Jesuit missionaries²⁹⁴ since the seventeenth century. Others are inspired by the general openness to the West²⁹⁵. In the case of these particular women, our interest is to see how the addition of a Lebanized Protestantism complicates matters as well.

Looking inside the homes of the women, we had to figure out what we were exactly looking at. Should we focus exclusively on practices with explicit religious content or history such as censuring, fasting, anointing or using holy water? Or should we also look at the more mundane practices such as cooking, decorating the house and dressing?

Tangle

Our attempt to separate what qualifies as religious home *rituals* from *everyday life* in this instance has completely failed. The two seem tangled to the point of blurring the borders

²⁹⁴ See for example: Bernard Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la Réforme Catholique, Syrie, Liban, Palestine XVIIe-XVIIIe s.*, (Rome: Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 1994); Chantal Verdeil, *La Mission Jésuite du Mont-Liban et de Syrie : 1830-1864*, (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2011); Heleen Murre-van den Berg, (ed.), *New Faiths in Ancient Lands: Western Missions in the Middle East in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*.

²⁹⁵ Such as the way Christmas is celebrated, the introduction of the American thanksgiving menu, the Easter bunny or Halloween. Inspired by travel, movies or the internet Western religious art, music, poems, and rituals have found their way into many Eastern homes.

between the one and the other. One has to ask: is what we are looking at all everyday practices, *habitus*²⁹⁶, and maybe maneuvers as Michel De Certeau proposes? or should we excavate the religious ritual proper and subject it to investigation from the perspective of ritual criticism or liturgical studies?

Anthropologist Roy Rappaport contrasts “liturgical performance with quotidian practice”²⁹⁷, or in other words ritual with everyday practices. Pastoral theologian Barbara J. McClure refers to Rappaport’s distinction between canonical and indexical practices. The first is “historically established, invariant and regularly performed”²⁹⁸, formal, often stylized and related to certain times and places. In addition, canonical rituals obviously refer to the Divine through the use of words and acts that are stereotypically religious. In our case, practices like censuring the house, anointing, reciting the Lord’s Prayer, Hail Mary or the Creed, or lighting a candle at a certain time in a certain place can be classified as canonical. The second type of practices, the indexical, “is more variant, is concerned with the here and now, is often practical”. Those practices “happen every day, and they say more about the present than they do about the past or the future”²⁹⁹. We think here of cooking, decorating the house, getting dressed, or even fiddling with one’s phone.

However, even when attempting to make these classifications one has to ask: when is cooking for example canonical and when is it indexical? Can we classify cooking on a fasting day as canonical while cooking on a regular day as non-canonical? Or can we separate getting dressed from wearing a Virgin Mary gold pendant? Despite Rappaport’s distinction he upholds that the two types of practices are interdependent and that ‘canonical meanings are communicated within and embodied by indexical practices’³⁰⁰ which without them will become mere routine. Therefore one cannot separate regular cooking and eating from ‘ritual’ eating and fasting, as one spills into the other. During participant observation, identifying practices as simply *routine* without spiritual or liturgical meaning was challenging. Najat, one of the respondents, related a story about a

²⁹⁶ Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, pp.52–65.

²⁹⁷ Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.127. Roy A. Rappaport, *Ecology, Meaning and Religion*, (Richmond, California: North Atlantic Books, 1979).

²⁹⁸ McClure, ‘Divining the Sacred’, p.734.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

dried up grape that she had conserved from the feast of the transfiguration and explained how it turned miraculous in her fridge by transforming into the image of the Virgin Mary. Speaking of the grape-raisin, Najat remembered that she wanted to offer her guest (the researcher) a traditional bowl of raisins and nuts as it was Christmas. The raisins offered are different from the miraculous raisin, they are not brought from church nor are they blessed officially. Yet something from the meaning of the miraculous raisin spilled onto the *banal* offering of food to the guest. Similarly, Mona cooks feast food ceremonially, but even when she bakes a ‘regular’ cake she makes the sign of the cross over her oven.

Moreover, many of these canonical practices or stylized rituals are derived from ecclesial liturgical rituals and have been established historically as proper Christian home rituals.³⁰¹ Censing, lighting candles and anointing at home are parallels to the rituals in Church and carry within them the same canonical meanings. Sharing *antidoron* at home and cooking fasting and feasting food is rooted in the ecclesial Eucharist.³⁰² Yet cooking food on regular days is also related and interdependent on cooking fasting food which in its turn is interrelated with canonical rituals and meanings. In other words everyday practices (indexical) embody meanings from home rituals (canonical) which in turn embody meanings from ecclesial rituals.

And here we get to an impasse: which ecclesial rituals are these? The women come from certain traditions, be it Orthodox or Maronite. But in many cases these women grew up in contexts where more than one tradition with its canonical rituals and meanings are present. Some have parents from two different traditions, or had a tradition at home and another in school, etc. Add to this the concern of our research, the fact that these women are regular members in the Lebanese Reformed Churches.

³⁰¹ Kim Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values and Religious Change in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, New York etc. Cambridge University Press, 2008); David Frankfurter, ‘The Interpenetration of Ritual Spaces’; Blake Leyerle, ‘Pilgrim Eulogiae and Domestic Rituals’ in *Archiv Fur Religionsgeschichte*, 10 (2008), pp. 223–238; Suzan J. White, *A History of Christian Women*, pp.201–241.

³⁰² Bernhard Heyberger, ‘Les Transformations du Jeûne chez les Chrétiens d’Orient’, in Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen et Bernard Heyberger (eds.), *Le Corps et le Sacré en Orient Musulman*, (Aix-en-Provence : Édisud, 2006), pp. 267–285.

Layers

These more or less canonical religious rituals are age old Christian practices derived from practices mentioned in Biblical narratives (censing, anointing, etc.) or other Mediterranean cultures. Taken up into Christianity, they acquired meanings derived from the incarnation or the corporality of Christ.³⁰³ Having travelled West, medieval Christianity added to them layers pertaining to sacrifice, transition, salvation, purgatory, indulgences, death, suffering and Mariology.³⁰⁴ By the seventeenth century as the Jesuit missionaries came to calibrate Christianity in their adoptive eastern Churches they came with rituals that resembled those in the East but were loaded with layers unknown to the easterners.³⁰⁵ In addition, the missionaries introduced totally new practices such as praying the Rosary.³⁰⁶ Furthermore, they brought with them modern notions that would affect the practices such as the focus on the individual rather than the corporate,³⁰⁷ and a sharp separation between spiritual and material worlds.

These modern notions were shared by the Anglo-American Protestant missionaries who came to the East in the nineteenth century and unintentionally started what today became the Lebanese Protestant Churches. However, many of the theological layers and forms in the practices found in the East at that time were abhorrent for the Protestant missionaries. These practices were classified as ‘outward manifestations’.³⁰⁸ They did not have enough focus on the individual or enough propositional content. Moreover, they were loaded with unacceptable intentions and theological associations such as salvific significance and their functioning as indulgences. These practices reveal much initiative of the human towards God, as if to effect his presence or manipulate his will. In addition, in much of the cases it is

³⁰³ Suzan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2006).

³⁰⁴ Jacob M. Baum, ‘From Incense to Idolatry: The Reformation of Olfaction in Late Medieval German Ritual’ in *Sixteenth Century Journal* XLIV/2 (2013); Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe: new Approaches to European History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

³⁰⁵ Bernard Heyberger, ‘Morale et Confessions chez les melkites d’Alep d’après une liste de péchés (fin XVIIe siècle)’ in Geneviève Gabillot (ed.), *L’Orient Chrétien dan l’empire Musulman : Hommage au professeur Gérard Troupeau*, (Versailles: Éditions de Paris, 2005), pp.283–306.

³⁰⁶ Willy Jansen, *Arab Women with a Mission: The Sisters of the Rosary*, in Martin Tamcke, Michael Marten (eds.), *Christian Witness between continuity and New Beginnings*, (Munster: LIT Verlag Berlin 2006) pp. 41–62.

³⁰⁷ Bernard Heyberger, ‘La Transformation du Jeûne’, p.274.

³⁰⁸ See also Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, Philip A. Mellor and Chris Shilling, *Re-forming the Body: Religion Community and Modernity*, (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997), chapter 4.

not clear to whom the rituals are addressed or whose authority is beseeched (the saints, Mary, the departed or the triune God), let alone what kind of outcome or result is intended (healing, exorcism, success etc.).

Alternatively, these missionaries who came inspired by the American second great awakening, immediately saw the education of girls as the key to improving the society. Through education they hoped to lead it away from what they saw as superstition and backwardness and purify the 'nominal' Churches³⁰⁹ from all that is 'ritualistic'. Longing for a 'sanctified and enlightened female influence', ³¹⁰ the missionaries linked 'home life', 'character' and 'service' to religion.³¹¹ They hoped to 'convey the ideals of evangelical motherhood and domesticity'.³¹² American schools for girls taught (American) home economics³¹³ including the skills of sewing and cooking. They taught the girls how to organize, decorate, dress (ethically) and clean one's house, promoting simplicity of dress and food.³¹⁴ They looked disapprovingly at the over-adorned Lebanese women, their gold jewelry and clothes, make up, and elaborate feasting. 'Home life' in its simplicity, efficiency, order and cleanliness was seen as an expression and reflection of Christian faith.

For the women we are considering all those home traditions, requirements, and expectations merge together. As they marry into the Protestant home, Protestant devout domesticity, Eastern rituals coated with layers of Jesuit and Latin piety, as well as traditional everyday practices have to be negotiated. We notice in the lives of these women that the multilayered canonical rituals tangled with the multifaceted everyday practices and expectations give each other meaning. Ronald Grimes explains that ritual is not bothered with inconsistency. On the contrary, it can contain what normally is considered opposition comfortably; ritual holds ambiguities together without solving them.³¹⁵ What for

³⁰⁹ Habib Badr, *Mission to Nominal Churches*, (Unpublished Dissertation, Princeton, 1992).

³¹⁰ Ellen Fleischmann, 'The Impact of American Protestant Missions in Lebanon on the Construction of Female Identity c.1860-1950', in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 13/4 (2002) pp. 411-426, in particular p.413.

³¹¹ Ellen Fleischmann, 'The Impact of American Protestant Missions', p. 417.

³¹² Heleen Murre-van den Berg, 'Nineteenth-century Protestant Missions and Middle Eastern Women', p. 107.

³¹³ Ellen Fleischmann, 'Lost in Translation: Home Economics and the Sidon Girls' School of Lebanon, c. 1924-1932' in *Social Sciences and Missions* 23, (2010), p.49.

³¹⁴ Ellen Fleischmann, 'Lost in Translation', p.58.

³¹⁵ Ronald Grimes, *Rite out Of Place*, (Oxford University Press, 2006), p.107.

researchers seems to be radically different worlds of practices, form but one private piety for these women.

To illustrate this complexity we give the following example. Antoinette had explained to us that she often brings blessed water from Orthodox or Maronite monasteries. “yes I bring” she said, “I give it to my children to drink and I put it on their forehead; I remember and copy a lot how the reverend (in the Protestant Church) when he is baptizing a child he puts on the hands, on the neck and on the head...yes I copy him and do that to my children”. A canonical practice at home which is supposed to be rooted in an official Orthodox practice emulates in this case a canonical ritual in a Protestant church; this practice in turn is interrelated to other everyday (indexical) practices. Therefore, tracing the meaning or source of these canonical practices would be futile.

Consequently, as we consider our field we have to underline that private worship– in this case at least– is not detached from ordinary life³¹⁶. As Nada, one of the respondents underlined, “I wake up in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit”. It is tangled with it to the point of confusion. Modern Western understandings of private worship, particularly those inspired by St Ignatius of Loyola, or by Protestant pietism and later Evangelicalism do not hold here. First, in this case worship is mingled with the everyday as opposed to the ideal of having time and space set aside with detachment and silence for meditating. Second, it is the ‘physical’ practices of the women rather than the ‘inner’ reflections of the soul that were highlighted as devotion. Their private life of worship appears to be a life of making, decorating, touching, moving, smelling, eating, dressing and not foremost a life of reading, learning, and reflecting. We turn then to look at these tangled layered practices in their totality and consider their collective meaning.

IV. Kinesthetic Knowing

Saying that these domestic worship lives are made of moving and doing rather than reflecting does not mean that these women do not think or read; on the contrary, most of them are highly educated and cultured. We propose however, that the way in which these

³¹⁶ Knowing that “Ordinary acts, when extraordinarily practiced, break open, transforming human conventions and revealing what is most deeply desirable, most cosmically orienting and most fully human” in Ronald Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone: Reinventing Rites of Passage*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 2000), p.246.

women reach out, beseech, and honor the Divine in the privacy of their home is mainly in their everyday tangle of practices which are remarkably kinesthetic.

Contemporary studies in the fields of ritual, cognitive science, psychology and pedagogy lead us on the track of dealing with ‘physical doing and sensing’ as valuable ways of knowing. We propose in what follows that these kinesthetic practices are valuable ways of knowing the Divine.

Kinesthetic

Kinesthetic practices are practices that involve sensory perceptions coupled with movements performed by the limbs.³¹⁷ A discussion across disciplines today proposes that physical gestures and manipulations of objects lead to learning and induce a form of knowledge. In an article entitled ‘How does the Body get into the Mind?’ scholars in applied cognitive science explain how ‘bodily experience is central to the way we know, think and make sense of the world’. ‘(I)n particular there is evidence’ they say ‘that object manipulation lead to symbolizing gestures’.³¹⁸ Though their discussion concerns students in science classrooms their argument is that ‘sensorimotor activation contributes to meaning and sensorimotor experience is a precursor of more abstract forms of representation’.³¹⁹ In a similar line, Mark Johnson³²⁰ refutes dualistic approaches to knowing and proposes that symbolic meaning and conceptual metaphors are rooted in embodied meaning and sensorimotor processes. These are not always translatable propositionally but inform the body about the world and its position in it facilitating the production of metaphors.

This making, touching, smelling, eating, gesturing, that we witnessed in the homes of the women is disturbing for Protestant theologians and believers. Besides the theological connotations, it is the kinesthetic aspect of it that awakens some modern and humanist concerns. The sixteenth century Reformers in agreement with humanists such as Erasmus classified sensorimotor practices and rituals in the context of worship as *outward practices*

³¹⁷ Which corresponds with Ronald Grimes depiction of rite as “an activity that engages the hand and pricks the ear”, see Ronald Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone*, p.344.

³¹⁸ Wolff-Michael Roth and Daniel V. Lawless, ‘How does the body get into the mind?’ in *Human Studies* Vol. 25, No. 3 (2002), pp. 333–358, p.333.

³¹⁹ Roth and Lawless, ‘How does the body get into the mind?’, p.334.

³²⁰ We rely here on the book, Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human understanding*, (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).

and *external worship* contrasting with *internal piety*.³²¹ The humanist turn to the ‘inside’ rather than the ‘outside’, to thought rather than practice and to the spiritual rather than the material is still entrenched in theological circles even today. The material turn in social and religious studies that we have witnessed in the last decades is little felt in theology.

Be that as it may, we argue that ‘outward manifestations’ do not remain outside the person but become ‘inside’ the person when kinesthetically³²² performed or done. The division between ‘outside’ and ‘inside’, though visually and metaphorically helpful for argumentation, clashes with our understanding of the person. The assumption that the skin is a hermetic barrier separating inside from outside and crossed via the senses suggests a certain limitation to the person and assumes a certain worldview.³²³ We wish however to propose not only the body, as a set of physiological organs, but the actions and practices of the body as means of knowing. Our focus here is therefore not primarily on seeing, hearing, and smelling³²⁴ (which are rather passive and receptive) but on those senses in combination with moving, manipulating, creating, consuming, and gesturing; in sum on *kinesthetic knowing*. We see in opening a cupboard, twisting the lid of a jar, crinkling a paper bag, grinding grains and flaming a coal or in slicing onions, boiling lentils and mashing them together a role in religious knowledge. By looking at this aspect we side with ritual scholars such as Ronald Grimes whose critique of liturgics is that it does not value enough ‘the tactile, gustatory, and kinesthetic aspects of liturgy’.³²⁵

³²¹ Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, pp.168–169. See also Baum, ‘From Incense to Idolatry’.

³²² The term kinesthetic as a lens to look at ritual and liturgy in general is proposed by Ronald Grimes in *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* and picked up by other scholars such as Marcia McFee in her dissertation *Primal Patterns: Ritual Dynamics, Ritual Resonance, Polyhythmic strategies and the Formation of Christian Disciples*, 2005.

³²³ We see this kind of delineation with the early church fathers who while underlining the senses as means of knowledge of the Divine still subscribe to division between inside and outside. See Adam G. Cooper, *The Body in St Maximus the Confessor: Holy Flesh, Wholly Deified*, Oxford Online Scholarship, 2005. We think also of John Of Damascus’s position where food is consumed, oil is absorbed, incense is smelled, and once it is inside it becomes knowledge. Ephrem the Syrian and John Chrysostom speak of the pedagogical validity of the senses.

³²⁴ In another article, Rima Nasrallah, Martien Brinkman, Heleen Murre-van den Berg and Marcel Barnard, ‘Itinerant Feasting: Eastern Christian Women Negotiating (Physical) Presence in the Celebration of Easter’ *Exchange* 42 (2013) 319–342, we have investigated the relation between the position of the body and perception of presence. However, here the focus is on the actions of the body rather than its position.

³²⁵ Ronald Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, p.5.

Few practical theologians³²⁶ and theologians interested in rituals³²⁷ have ventured into the discussion of how the actions and sensations of physical bodies relate to religious and theological knowledge, and we will discuss this in what follows.

Religious knowledge

In her article entitled ‘Embodied knowing, embodied theology: what happened to the body?’, practical theologian Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore denounces theologians’ common tendency to take the physical body out of the discussion on embodied theology. Despite the proliferation of studies on embodiment today, she sustains that much of it falls in the trap of considering it as a linear text or of abstracting it.³²⁸ Instead, she looks at more tangible actions and practices like birthing and mothering as embodied theology. Together with few other theologians, she underlines that certain knowledge happens in the body through everyday practice and that there is a relation between the ‘worshipping bodies and “knowing God”’.³²⁹

The assumption here is that the ‘location’ of knowledge is in the body but that it happens through practice and action. ‘Doing is also thinking, albeit an exceptional form of thinking’,³³⁰ explains Henk Borgdorff.³³¹ Miller-McLemore asserts that certain physical practices ‘shape how and what one knows or even how one conceives of the divine’.³³² Metaphors such as how far or close, high or low, terrible or approachable the Divine is are performed in bodily actions. We think in our case of kneeling, touching, looking up, eating, drinking etc. The understanding and knowledge of how the Divine relates to one’s world as far as protection, healing, sustenance, and transformation are worked out in actions like

³²⁶ We name Barbara McClure and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore as examples.

³²⁷ Such as Theodore W. Jennings Jr, ‘On Ritual Knowledge’, in Ronald Grimes (ed.), *Readings in Ritual Studies*, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1996, pp. 324–334).

³²⁸ Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, ‘Embodied Knowing’ p.746.

³²⁹ Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, ‘Embodied Knowing’ p.749.

³³⁰ Henk Borgdorff, *The Conflict of the Faculties, Perspectives on Artistic Research and Academia*, (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2012), p.21.

³³¹ Considering here that “art” is “a way of making” that can be equivalent to practices; see De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p.xv.

³³² Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, ‘Embodied Knowing’, p.750.

wiping, lighting, cleaning, mixing, etc. However, located ‘somewhere’³³³ in the body, this knowledge is non-conceptual. ‘Bodies know the world in ways that exceed our disciplinary ways of knowing; bodies tell stories that press beyond the closures of scholarly telling’,³³⁴ reminds Jennifer A. Glancy.

Glancy starts her book *Corporal Knowledge: Early Christian Bodies* by retelling the story of the bleeding woman in the Markan narrative (Mark 5: 25–34). Glancy points the attention to the ‘Markan turn of phrase “she knew³³⁵ in her body”’.³³⁶ The suffering woman having sneaked up behind Jesus reached out and touched his outer garment, was immediately cured and *knew it in her body*. Similarly, Jesus ‘knew in himself that power had gone out of him’.

Though Glancy’s focus here is on the way the woman knew ‘in her body’, we want to remind that this knowledge came simultaneously with an action, a doing: A sneaking, a pushing, and touching. In that action there was thought³³⁷ and knowledge that cannot easily be chronologically ordered. In the same way, when Antoinette places an image of Jesus under the mattress of her children, when Nada wears a cross pendant, or Najat lights a candle there is thought and knowledge in action and in the body rather than in the intellect.

For theorists such as Bourdieu, this kind of knowledge (or faith) stemming from *habitus* is considered pre-reflexive or pre-verbal.³³⁸ We chose for the term non-conceptual in order not to suggest that such kind of knowledge always leads to reflection or is subordinate to it.³³⁹ On the contrary, though it could lead and direct reflexivity and discursive thought, it does not necessarily transform or translate into it. ‘Meaning’ in the words of Mark Johnson ‘is more than words and deeper than concepts’.³⁴⁰ In our case we hear Antoinette for

³³³ Ronald Grimes underlines that “Special ritual occasions are much less likely than sustained ritual routines to drive meaning into the bone. So it is necessary to consider ceremonies (...) of the kitchen...” Ronald Grimes, *Deeply Into the Bones*, p.337.

³³⁴ Jennifer A Glancy, *Corporal Knowledge, Early Christian Bodies*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.4.

³³⁵ Glancy argues that the translation “felt in her body” is not adequate, but rather “knew in her body”.

³³⁶ Jennifer Glancy, *Corporal Knowledge*, p.3.

³³⁷ The Markan account says “Because she thought “If I just touch his cloths...”.

³³⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, p.68.

³³⁹ We can also call it “the logic of unselfconscious thought” after DeCerteau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p.xv.

³⁴⁰ Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body*, p.1.

example adding after each practice she describes: 'it means a lot to me'. But on the other hand she never really says *what* it means.

This meaning, or religious knowledge, that the women have in their kinesthetic practices could be performed but could hardly be put in words. The women could show and describe but not explain what this knowledge is. However, one thing became clear to us as we observed and participated in these kinesthetic practices: Protestant practices alone, though highly valued and admired are not 'enough' for the women. After having expanded on how wonderful she thought Protestant faith practices are, Nadine confessed that alone they are not enough. 'I like these things that we do; I like to dip my fingers in water and wipe it on my children's forehead for example'.³⁴¹ At the same time she underlined that her practices are not at all the same as other Eastern Christian women she knows, her sister's or friends' or neighbors'. She makes lots of variations *because – she insists–* she is now Protestant.

V. Variation and Play

Talking to the women and looking at their practices we noticed indeed that these highly kinesthetic practices are not simply reproductions of inherited practices. They are in many ways personal variations. The selection of actions and gestures, the manner in which they are done, the ingredients and instruments used, the words accompanying some actions, all bear witness to Protestant influence. However, despite the Protestant presence and continuous challenge to these practices, they are not totally abandoned nor do they run parallel to and independent of a Protestant faith practiced elsewhere (in a Church). In their variations they function as an arena where the women 'physically' work out their complex yet basic knowledge of God in the everyday.

For classical Reformed theology that claims that 'Scripture is the sole source of right religious knowledge'³⁴² this might seem alien. However, Reformed theologians today dare to embrace such attitudes while still faithful to their tradition.³⁴³ Theodore W. Jennings Jr.

³⁴¹ Nadine, *Interview*, 2013.

³⁴² Lukas Vischer (ed.), *Christian Worship in Reformed Churches Past and Present*, (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), p.6.

³⁴³ Referring to Jean-Luc Marion, Martien Brinkman underlines that "revelation is not independent, exceptional knowledge for which human being has to develop special religious antennae. Revelation is knowledge acquired from the everyday 'too much', from the surplus that characterizes our lives both positively and negatively." linked to the message of

in an often quoted article entitled ‘On Ritual Knowledge’ raises such issues starting with concerns of systematic theology about the nature and methods of theological reflection. Claiming Karl Barth’s unity of ‘theology and ethics’ and Liberation theology’s ‘theory and practice’ as a starting point he sets out to establish that religious rituals are ‘also basic to theological reflection’.³⁴⁴ From his ‘three ‘moments’ in the noetic function of ritual’³⁴⁵ we are interested in the first which states that ‘ritual activity is a way of gaining knowledge’.³⁴⁶

Jennings highlights the concept of *variation* as the key that makes of rituals a quest, or a ‘coming to know’. Rituals, he underlines, are not the result of knowledge or an application of the myth. They *are* a knowledge ‘which is identical with doing and acting’ and which is ‘gained through the alteration of that which is to be known.’³⁴⁷ To illustrate this, Jennings speaks of Catholic rites in different areas of the world and how in each case there are variations. He adds that even when the rite itself is not altered its repetition is never the same but variations always happen. It is in these variations, ‘the exploration which seeks to discover the right action or sequence of actions’³⁴⁸ where ‘knowledge of the world as encountered by the Sacred’³⁴⁹ occurs.

Variations

We have argued earlier that doing, moving, making, smelling, touching, handling objects in the everyday practices and rituals is a way of knowing. They are a corporal kinesthetic knowledge about the world and one’s relation to it. This knowledge becomes religious knowledge when the practices ‘are enlightened, or (...) intentionally relate the ordinary to a longer historical narrative, embedding them within a deeper cosmic reality’.³⁵⁰ However, when all these practices are inherited ‘habits’ the intensity of meaning can be lost, and that

Jesus, it becomes Christian revelation, Martien Brinkman, *Jesus Incognito: The Hidden Christ in Western Art since 1960*, (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2012), p.26.

³⁴⁴ Theodore W. Jennings Jr., ‘On Ritual Knowledge’, p.325.

³⁴⁵ The three moments are: First, ritual as coming to know, of gaining knowledge; second, ritual as means of transmitting knowledge; and the third, ritual as the objectification of knowledge.

³⁴⁶ Theodore W. Jennings Jr., ‘On Ritual Knowledge’, p.325.

³⁴⁷ Theodore W. Jennings Jr., ‘On Ritual Knowledge’, p.327.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Barbara J. McClure, ‘Divining the Sacred’, p.735.

which is potentially understood as a whole ‘being held by God’,³⁵¹ becomes a dormant knowledge.

Jennings explains ‘if there were no variation in the ritual performance, we would have to conclude that there is here neither search nor discovery but only transmission and illustration of knowledge gained elsewhere and otherwise’.³⁵² Variations, if we are to stretch Jennings theory, revitalize the potential of everyday practices and rituals in both the *quest for God* and *the transformation of one’s relations with God*.

Challenged by the opinion of others³⁵³ as well as their own changing convictions, the women considered find themselves making more obvious and exaggerated variations in their practices. Being in this complex liturgical situation, each woman has to figure out the right tools to use. She should decide whether incense is acceptable, or butter can be used instead of oil. She has to come up with the right sequence of actions such as choosing where to start censuring or if she should cross herself first. One’s kitchen, shopping list and even wardrobe become thus a place where small choices have large meanings.³⁵⁴

Therefore, it is more than just adding one kind of piety to another but transforming the home into a ‘laboratory’ or a ‘workshop’ of liturgical experimentation and tinkering.³⁵⁵ Observing the women and hearing them discuss their rituals one can see a continuous fiddling, playing and toying with existing practices and objects. The lighting of a candle, for example, is done in a vast number of ways. Not only does each woman have her own way to light a candle but this way is also always ‘experimental’. The kind of candle is changed, sometimes it is with a printed picture of a saint and sometimes, sometimes a tea light or an oil floater. The place where it is lit changes: in a home altar, kitchen, or entrance. The frequency and time changes, it could be every Sunday or only in times of trouble.

Without prior design, the women change and vary their sets of actions and gestures. Decisions and variations occur simultaneously with practices. There is no anterior planning

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Theodore W. Jennings Jr., ‘On Ritual Knowledge’, p.326.

³⁵³ Husbands and Protestant Church members as well as mothers, sisters, neighbors and friends from various Eastern Churches challenge the women’s practices and choices in many different ways.

³⁵⁴ “...practices as different and ordinary as what people wear, how we manage finances, and we sing hymns are ‘also... assertions of theology’” explains Bonnie Miller-McLemore in *Christian Theology in Practice*, p. 4.

³⁵⁵ A concept found in Grimes, Latour, Lévi-Strauss, Barnard and others.

nor is there a post-evaluation. When asked why they do what they do in the way they do it, the women answer 'I don't know'. As Lara explained that she censures all the corners of her house, we asked 'why?' and the answer came 'I don't know, corners creep me out'. When Mona showed her censuring ritual telling about her visiting of every room and repetition of prayers she says 'I do this while holding this (the censor) in my hand; but why? I don't know.' And when Pamela explained how, despite her mother's outraged reaction, she has dropped cooking fasting food on Fridays, she couldn't find a clear explanation. The women perform their practices 'instinctively', and 'instinctively' they adjust them, change them and adapt them.

This of course does not mean that the changes and variations are arbitrary. On the contrary, the variations are in themselves a quest and a processing of theological convictions.

Whether making slight adjustments, as where to light a candle, or making greater changes like discarding fasting altogether, the women are figuring out what they believe about God and how they relate to the Divine and to creation. The fact that their practices as a whole and in their details are continually challenged by the presence of the Protestant Church and faith in their life makes their rituals more of a 'dance'—if we are to use Gerardus van der Leeuw's words—where each woman 'discovers the rhythm that surrounds (her) (...) and invents a response'.³⁵⁶

This rhythm is the rhythm of daily challenges and family circumstances such as sickness, birth, or separation, but also a rhythm played by the tensions in the theological complexity that surrounds them. While hearing in the Protestant Churches assertions such as 'humans (...) do not choose for themselves how to worship God; they learn from God's word what is pleasing to the Lord'³⁵⁷ and wanting to make their own steps inspired by the repertoire they inherited, their 'dance' becomes more vigorous.

Playing

Nevertheless, all these variations in the gestures, accompanying words and objects are not taken stringently. There is no rigidity but rather playfulness in these particular

³⁵⁶ Gerardus van Der Leeuw, *Sacred and Profane Beauty: The Holy in Art*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 14.

³⁵⁷ Lukas Vischer, *Christian Worship in Reformed Churches*, p.8.

performances. We see playfulness in working around obstacles, in creativity and imagination but also playfulness in attitude. The rituals are not seen as necessary or indispensable and immutable. ‘They are an addition’ as Mona asserts; they are play.

The concept of playing in association with liturgy and worship is not new. Inspired by Plato and Romano Guardini, Bernhard Lang entitles his book on Christian worship ‘Sacred Games’.³⁵⁸ The metaphor of playing assumes that liturgy has no function, and is not productive.³⁵⁹ It gives the impression that liturgy is useless, that it is a waste of time.³⁶⁰ However, playing conveys other dimensions and is also considered in association with knowledge.³⁶¹

First and foremost playing has no extrinsic goals but is intrinsically motivated. By attributing ‘play’ to the practices of the women, we are underlying their freedom in choosing to do so. Play is spontaneous and voluntary and involves active engagement on the part of the player³⁶². Second, play is pleasurable. ‘I like it’ or ‘it is nice’ or even ‘it is delicious’ are some of the adjectives the women gave for some practices they do. They ‘play’ for the joy of it. We propose in this context to look at the metaphor of ‘playing’ not in association with gaming where winning and losing are possible³⁶³ nor with gambling where one is hoping for jackpot. Rather, we propose to look at ‘play’ in association with performance/theatre and art/craft³⁶⁴ where there is no winning and losing but interpreting, creating and enjoying.

From the perspective of performance, we see that the women play their practices. They play a role, assume a posture, have certain gestures, mumble certain texts, lift objects, and move ceremonially in their spaces. Though not all rituals and practices are stylized and

³⁵⁸ Bernhard Lang, *Sacred Games: A History of Christian Worship*, (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1997), p.x.

³⁵⁹ A notion revisited and critiqued in Marcel Barnard, Johan Cilliers, Cas Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture. Liturgical-Ritual Studies, Fields and Methods, Concepts and Metaphors*, (Liturgia Condenda), (Leuven-Paris-Walpole, Forthcoming), chapter 10. Or a royal “Waste” of time in the words of Marva J. Dawn, *A Royal “Waste” of Time: The Splendor of Worshipping God and Being Church in the World*, (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999).

³⁶⁰ Marcel Barnard, Johan Cilliers, Cas Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, chapter 10.

³⁶¹ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), see chapter 6: Playing and Knowing, p.105–118.

³⁶² Catherine Garvey, *Play (The Developing Child Series)*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1990. p.4.

³⁶³ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, pp.1–27.

³⁶⁴ We do so while acknowledging the potency of performance and art; see Ronald Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 294–337.

choreographed, they do call upon another reality. Through performing the women inscribe themselves in that cosmic understanding and call upon it. They perform their roles in a world that might have evil spirits lurking in corners, deceased relatives looking through pictures, or angels floating over the beds of children. It is a world where protection, healing and transformation are possible. By performing they become part of the world where God, the angels, the saints and the dead are active. They enter that world bringing their sighs and moans into it. But at the same time they perform in the 'sight' of that audience. Though all this happens in the privacy of the home, the 'theatre' can still be seen from 'above' or from 'around' by an audience of another kind³⁶⁵. When Lara performs her censuring ritual for example, she is not alone. Her gestures are performed in the sight of someone, directed towards someone, communicating with someone.

This playing has also a dimension of crafting or art. It is not only role-playing and performing, but also fiddling, combining, mixing, adding, or as we mentioned in Jennings words, varying. It is not only playing their practices, but physically playing with their practices. They compose home-altars by assembling pieces and objects, they make delicately shaped cookies, decorate a dish with nuts and raisins, dye eggs, make a wreath, draw a cross on someone's skin using oil, dip their fingers in water, etc. The next time or next year they might vary on that design or order. In all this crafting, the end result is not as important as the process of making it. This cannot therefore be classified as work but mostly as play. By playing in this manner, the women perpetuate their religious quest and explore their relation with God and his creation.

The fact that we chose for the metaphor of playing doesn't imply that the women do not take God or the Divine seriously. On the contrary, God is taken very seriously; God's presence and actions are perceived in all aspects of the women's lives and their trust in him is total. In this tangle of kinesthetic practices they enjoy a knowledge of God that is not possible through other means. It is a basic knowledge that they explore and activate via variations. However, this basic and corporal knowledge is unsettled and shaken in their case by a Protestant discourse that cannot be ignored or separated from what they are doing.

³⁶⁵ A notion expressed by Jennings as well in 'On Ritual Knowledge', p.332.

VI. Kinesthetic Blurring

In a classical understanding of prayer, one imagines two persons talking to each other: the person of the one praying and the person of God or Jesus with discontinuity between the one and the other. Prayer is approached as a dialog between two people where one voices adoration, praise, confession, thanksgiving, intercession and dedication and the *Other* listens and then responds. In the type of kinesthetic practices that we have described another imagery is suggested for relating with God.

First, the women who walk around their houses, touch and make things do not view themselves as *individuals* in prayer. The practices they do, their ‘prayers’, encompass more people. The women do not ‘speak’– here this is done in action– only on behalf of themselves but involve with them children, husbands, departed loved ones, and even the creation. When they cook and serve, they are bringing with them those who eat and those who smell as well as what is being cooked in a certain position. At the same time the women’s own position as individuals is blurred in these practices.

Second, God –or the Divine– does not seem to be another individual sitting on the other side of the table, or up in heaven, waiting to hear what the women have to say. God seems to be everywhere in the house: somewhere above the ceiling, or down in a pot on the fire, under the bed, inside the closets, on the walls and in little jars. In addition, God is not very focused; He also seems to be a person with blurred contours. In many of the practices we see a shifting of the image of the Divine: he has the face of Jesus hanging on the wall, or the Virgin Mary on a pendant or of one of the saints framed on the shelf.

Even more, the separation between the women and the Divine is not always sharp. A kind of fusion or continuity is perceived particularly in practices of eating³⁶⁶ where one is digested by the other, or wiping where the skin absorbs the holy, or where the holy is drunk.³⁶⁷ In their practices the women mix, not only their individual selves or family but their whole

³⁶⁶ Reminding of Mary Douglas’ article “Deciphering a Meal” where she asserts that intimacy or closeness of a relationship can be measured by the food that is shared between people, in Mary Douglas, ‘Deciphering a Meal’ in *Daedalus*, 1/101, (winter 1972), pp. 61–82.

³⁶⁷ A Johannine theme (John 14:20) that we see also in the discourse of Early Church Fathers, as well as in some Maronite hymns and Orthodox doctrines.

world and environment with the entire Divine world.³⁶⁸ This form of knowing and communicating with the Divine is very intimate and immediate, while spare of propositional content and vocabulary.

Nevertheless, the presence of the Protestant church in the life of the women supplies them with an elaborate vocabulary with which they can envelop these practices. Woven into the tangle, Protestant canonical language gives them a certain coating that does not intrinsically belong to them. The unmistakable and substantial Christo-centric vocabulary in Protestant services, coupled with a general and more global Evangelical and charismatic 'Jesus' centered piety, drives the women to wrap their discourse on their practices with such language. Speaking of their practices, describing them during interviews or explaining them as they practice them, the women use the Christ-only language to specify the addressee of their practices. The name of Jesus is attributed to an otherwise cloudy mix of practices. While the practices themselves convey an undetermined sustaining experience of the Divine in the everyday through physical action, the discourse used around them depicts a well defined transcendent Other, namely Jesus, whose work is that of salvation and liberation.

This incongruity between the kinesthetics of the practices and the discourse around them does not however create distress. It rather works as an incentive for the women to continue varying their practices and by this keeping them from essentializing and fossilizing.

³⁶⁸ It reminds us of the crumbled communion bread in Fida's purse.



Mother of baptized baby and Nun emptying Baptismal water in Saydnaya, Antiochian Orthodox Monastery.

Photo: R. Nasrallah

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Chapter 6: Kinetics of Healing:

Protestant Women Pledging Baptism in Saydnaya Orthodox Monastery

They travel for many hours on the long, winding, and arid road up the rocky hills to the monastery of our lady of Saydnaya. They climb the high stairs, visit the small apse-shaped chapel, light some candles, chat to the nuns and bring back holy oil and incense. Most of them have done this at some point in their life. Many have done it more than once. They have visited, they have been baptized or have had their children baptized there. Though socially they are considered Protestants, their bond with Saydnaya is very special and it inspires something particular in each one of them. *They* are the women considered in this ongoing study and Saydnaya is one of their places.

They are Lebanese women from Antiochian Orthodox or Maronite backgrounds who, by marrying a Lebanese Protestant Reformed man, join the small Lebanese Reformed Protestant Church. In these Protestant congregations they constitute the great majority of the women. In Middle Eastern Christianity, it is customary for women to join their husband's church and denomination upon marriage. As this joining requires no official transfer of membership or re-education, it happens automatically and rather smoothly. Though the official liturgy of the Lebanese Reformed Protestant Church seems to be unaffected by this massive and regular grafting into its membership, the unofficial liturgical practices that result from the inclusion of these women in the assembly are diverse and rich. The focused and organized Reformed Sunday liturgy, modeled after the Anglo-American nineteenth century Presbyterian missionaries' liturgical heritage,³⁶⁹ inosculates with an Eastern liturgical heritage of these women to produce in their private lives a fluidity of motion between their private and liturgical life-spheres. This paper focuses on how the

³⁶⁹ Habib Badr, "Evangelical Missions and Churches in the Middle East: Lebanon, Syria and Turkey," in *Christianity: A History in the Middle East*, ed. Habib Badr (Beirut: Middle East Council of Churches [MECC], 2005); Ussama Makdesi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2008) and Heleen Murre-van den Berg, ed., *New Faiths in Ancient Lands: Western Missions in the Middle East in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

liturgical life of the women in question is performed in motion, and which will be illustrated by using the example of the well-known baptismal practices in Saydnaya as one of the stations in what can be termed their ‘kinetics of healing.’

In studying the liturgical lives of these women, ethnographic methods have been used. Interviews, participant observation and spiritual autobiographies of the women considered show that their liturgical experience is enacted in many different places. The concept of place—and more specifically liturgical space—occupies a central position in the dynamics of their complex spirituality. Not only are the places in which they move liturgically significant, but more specifically the way in which they move in the places and between them is of signal importance. The role of ritual place in meaning-generation has been addressed by many scholars of religion and of liturgy, and by ritual experts,³⁷⁰ whose proposals and debates have informed this study. Their insights can shed light on how the women studied here deal with illness and find healing through physical movement inside and between various significant places.

This paper will broadly introduce the need for healing and the types of “illness” that are suffered by these Middle Eastern women. It will then describe the fluidity of the physical movement of these particular women, focusing on a certain liturgical movement in a particular place, namely, baptism in Saydnaya Antiochian Orthodox monastery. How this mode of baptism matches the fluidity and movement found in the lives of the women under consideration, and how it helps them in their process of healing and finding a liturgical home, will then be explored.

I. Long-Term Emotions

Thomas Tweed writes that ‘religion involves emotions’.³⁷¹ According to his definition, religions ‘intensify joy and confront suffering’.³⁷² Two particular emotions tend to run through the life stories of the Lebanese Reformed women studied here: sadness and disorientation. One of these women explained, ‘My favorite feast is Good Friday. I go to the Funeral of Jesus, I walk behind the coffin, I lay my flowers on it, sing the lament songs and weep and weep and weep.’

³⁷⁰ See, for example, the work of Jonathan Z. Smith, Ronald Grimes, David Brown, Paul Post and Thomas Tweed.

³⁷¹ Thomas Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008) 69.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 54.

Then I go home relieved'.³⁷³ Good Friday, and more specifically what is known as the Funeral of Jesus, has been singled out by many of the women studied here as being one of the most beautiful liturgical moments of the year. It is a time and space to weep. Compared with many of their Arab sisters, Lebanese Christian women find themselves in a more privileged position. Socially, economically and educationally, they are offered better opportunities than others.³⁷⁴ However, this does not negate the fact that their lives are engulfed with unresolved 'long-term emotions' which are "long-lasting, underlying tones or moods that permeate social life'.³⁷⁵ The long and painful experience of war³⁷⁶ created a depressed and anxious generation³⁷⁷ that went through traumatic experiences, suffering displacement, loss of property, alienation, separation from family members, and a continuous change of lifestyle. Their religious consciousness and self-understanding were marred by bloody inter-religious wars, and their traditions and religious rituals have thereby been truncated as a result.

Displacement caused by wars combined with massive urbanization has meant that many Lebanese women lost the places and ritual traditions of their childhood, rituals that could have helped them to deal with the deep-seated and sometimes latent sadness produced from accumulated frustrations, deceptions, and feelings of incapacity generated by the war. In this corner of the world, violence and injustice are omnipresent. Lebanon is a highly hierarchical, male-dominated society which tends to leave women vulnerable and limits the opportunities for them to take charge of their own lives.³⁷⁸ Disorientation is another long-term emotion affecting the spiritual lives of the women considered in this

³⁷³ Imm Sharbel, interview with the author, December 29, 2009.

³⁷⁴ Nikki R. Keddie, *Women in the Middle East: Past and Present* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007); Mirna Lattouf, *Women, Education, and Socialization in Modern Lebanon: 19th and 20th Centuries Social History* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2004) and Ruth Roded, *Women in Islam and the Middle East: A Reader* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008).

³⁷⁵ Long-term emotions such as dissatisfaction or indifference have to be understood in contrast with the clearly identifiable disruptive emotions such as fear, joy or anger. The first are "undramatic," "smoothly persistent," and result from "considerable work." For more on long-term emotions see Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004) 105–6.

³⁷⁶ This refers to the civil war (1975–90) which was followed by a long period of political unrest and interrupted peace which continues still today.

³⁷⁷ Monique Chaaya, "The Lebanese Experience," in *Children of War, Where to?* ed. Salpi Eskidjian (Limassol [Cyprus]: MECC, 1995).

³⁷⁸ Maha Fakhoury, *الروابط النفسية والاجتماعية للمرأة المسيحية, The Psycho-Social Ties of the Christian Woman: A Field Study* (Beirut: Annour, 2000).

research. Having been raised within highly demonstrative³⁷⁹ Eastern liturgical traditions, they have had to learn to cope with a discursive Protestant tradition. Without guidance and example, each woman must try to cope with this liturgical disorientation by creating her own personal form of liturgical spirituality and expression. This process is an individual and private venture where every woman instinctively takes elements from the separate traditions and mixes them together, places them alongside each other, or transforms them into new varieties of liturgical expression. Their spiritual life and lived theology cannot be classified as either Maronite or Reformed; rather, these women dwell in a grey area in between two or three traditions.

This sense of multiple belongings is not unique to these particular women. Lebanese Christians in general live with a mix of traditions where a husband and wife could be from different denominations and where the school their children attend belongs to a church tradition different from that of the home. The more common blend remains a mix between traditions sharing the same discourse, worldview and lifestyle. For a woman from a Maronite background, mixing with the Protestant church generates a totally different style and approach to spiritual life, which can create disorientation, but also can result in a creative reorientation.

Long-term emotions such as sadness and disorientation are often dealt with by these women through the production of personal liturgical styles that are expressed largely through movement and are in motion.

II. Kinetics³⁸⁰

The amalgam and mixture of the Orthodox and Protestant traditions results in liquid forms of liturgical expression that are performed in fluid spaces in the lives of these women. As is the case with liquids, these forms of liturgical expression cannot be pinned down or demarcated. On the contrary, they tend to flow and to change shape as they channel through the many courses in which they stream.³⁸¹ The fluid liturgical forms in this case

³⁷⁹ Since both the Maronite and Antiochian Orthodox liturgies have their roots in the Antiochian rite, which is also known as the West Syrian rite, Varghese's characterization of the liturgies as demonstrative apply to them as well. See Baby Varghese, *West Syrian Liturgical Theology: Liturgy, Worship and Society* (Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate, 2004) 7.

³⁸⁰ The concept of kinetics in relation to worship is based on that found in Tweed's *Crossing and Dwelling*.

³⁸¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000); aquatic imagery is also basic in Tweed's theory to underline that "religious traditions" are not "static, isolated, and immutable substances" (*Crossing and Dwelling*, 60).

take place in three fashions: in the texture of the liturgical lives, in the mapping of the places in which it occurs, and in the actual process of worship.

The texture of the liturgical lives of these women is woven through the combination of many elements, some of which are by no means stable. The elements and their meanings change with time, and the texture they combine to produce is not the same for every woman considered. When the two traditions come together, elements (e.g., objects, actions, and concepts) are chosen to build up new liturgical lives. The Bible, candles, icons, oil, and hymns can be some of the objects chosen. Kneeling, sitting, walking in processions, and cooking certain liturgical foods can be some of the actions. Justification by faith, sanctification through worship, original sin and its repercussions can be some of the concepts. The objects, actions, and concepts may not necessarily appear to be compatible to the onlooker, but because they have woven these elements together themselves, in the lives of these women they acquire coherence, and form a unique fluid motion.

With time and in this motility, the elements chosen often change: for example, seeking the help of the Virgin Mary could be added or the burning of incense could be given up. Not only does the combination of elements change, the meaning of the elements can change as well. For example, burning a candle could have distinctive meanings at different times and in different contexts during one's life. This continuous change and motion is often triggered by the meeting of the two very different liturgical traditions and their interaction in a particular person's life. In an instinctive attempt to find balance, a continuous shuffling and reinterpreting gives these fluid textures a quicksilver character.

The spaces in which the liturgical lives of these women are enacted are elastic and dynamic. There is no one place that their liturgical life unfolds, but rather there are many places that are different for each woman and that keep changing. Some women attend the Orthodox church on Wednesday and the Protestant church on Sunday, while others attend the Maronite church in the village and the Protestant church in the city. Still others attend the Protestant church on ordinary days and their mother church on festive days. In addition, it is not only church buildings that host their liturgical lives. The women worship at home around a house altar, at a shrine or a pilgrimage site, in the fields, or in cemeteries.³⁸² Conversations with and observations of these women showed that the movement between these many spiritual places resembles more a continuous circumgyration than a commute between two stations.

³⁸² This observation which has been deduced from ethnographic material finds a parallel in Susan J. White's description of "The Places of Women's Worship," in *A History of Women in Christian Worship* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim, 2003) 39-80.

Finally, worship itself for these women is almost never a stationary activity. On the contrary, a lot of physical movement is involved. Besides moving from one place to another, various physical movements occur in each place. In the homes, movement occurs in cooking liturgical food or in censuring the corners of the house. Pilgrimage sites, monasteries, and shrines often involve vertical, horizontal or circular movements: going up and down the stairs, in and out of chapels, walking in small processions, kneeling, touching, lighting candles, etc. Even in the Protestant church where sitting and standing seem to be the only movements, shaking hands and drinking coffee after the service can also be included.

Many of the stories told are built around motion-related vocabulary. In this context it is not the place alone that is the defining factor,³⁸³ but instead is the combination of the three factors of place, act, and time that defines the meaning of this liturgical motion; this combination, in the study of physics, produces motion. It is thus the movement in the places and between the places that generates meaning for the women in their changing and streaming spirituality. Tweed emphasizes the significance of movement in order to “correct theories that presuppose stasis.”³⁸⁴ The links are clear between Tweed’s teleographies and the significance of the movement for the women studied here. Before considering Tweed’s theories further, a brief case study of what occurs at a place of particular significance will be illuminating. How the women studied here seek healing in “finding a place and moving across space”³⁸⁵ can be seen in the example of Saydnaya.

III. Saydnaya

The journey and quest for healing often passes through Saydnaya monastery or other similar places. Saydnaya and similar pilgrimage sites represent ill-defined areas, indefinite boundaries that constitute a kind of twilight zone where a momentary community and an instantaneous rite can facilitate a healing process. Saydnaya is a “sanctuary” where “the ill and their families can dwell for the sole purpose of meditating on images of illness and health.”³⁸⁶

³⁸³ Paul Post, “Places Enough: An Exploration of the Triad of Place, Ritual and Religion,” *Questions Liturgiques* 89 (2008) 162–79. See also Ronald Grimes’ critique of Jonathan Z. Smith where he widens the definition to stress the act or content in addition to place. Ronald L. Grimes, *Rite Out of Place: Ritual, Media, and the Arts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

³⁸⁴ Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 77.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

³⁸⁶ Ronald L. Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in its Practice, Essays on its Theory* (Waterloo: Ritual Studies International, 2010), 123.

Saydnaya is a village located in the mountains (1500 m elevation) some thirty kilometers north of the city of Damascus. It is one of the most popular pilgrimage sites in the Levant area, and as an ancient episcopal city of the Patriarchate of Antioch, Saydnaya is associated with many biblical accounts³⁸⁷ and miraculous apparitions. Christians from all denominations, as well as Muslims, Druze and Jews, flock to it throughout the year to visit its many churches and monasteries. Though the village hosts some thirty-six monasteries, the Greek Orthodox (or Antiochian Orthodox) monastery of our Lady of Saydnaya is the most famous and ancient of all. Its miraculous icon, said to have been painted by Saint Luke the Evangelist, and locked behind decorated windows, is venerated and honored by all. Located in the dark small chapel, the *Shaghoura*,³⁸⁸ it represents the epicenter of popular piety in the monastery.

Prostrated on their knees, the ardent faithful petition the Virgin for healing and for fertility. Among the many icons, in the dim candle-lit space, women longing for motherhood spend the night next to the famous icon. Along the walls of the chapel hang dozens of old blackened icons, huge incense burners and (under them) metal and gold ex-votos. Those desperate for motherhood not only burn the candles but also eat their wicks, and when they bear children, they return to baptize them in the monastery.

Though Saydnaya is visited for many different reasons, its specialty is babies: their conception, their gender³⁸⁹ and their health. These requests, once answered, are crowned with a baptism celebrated in the monastery. According to Mother Christina Bazz (the late mother superior of the monastery community), every Friday and Sunday the monastery can have up to thirty-five baptisms for families who were infertile and were granted children through the intercession of the Lady of Saydnaya,³⁹⁰ or for sick children who were healed. Everyone is welcome, according to Sister Febronia:³⁹¹ Muslims, Christians, Druze, and Jews. They all come, visit, pray, pledge, and baptize. ‘The Virgin welcomes them all,’ she says. ‘When the pregnant Virgin visited her pregnant cousin Elizabeth she said, “from now on *all* people shall call me blessed,” she reminds us. Therefore all are welcome, especially when infertility is involved and the Virgin answers.

³⁸⁷ Saydnaya is popularly believed to be the site where Cain sew his brother Abel.

³⁸⁸ The name *Shaghoura* refers both to the small chapel and to the Virgin Mary herself.

³⁸⁹ Conceiving a baby boy is of paramount importance for many Arab families and the arrival of a boy is both paved with prayer and answered with special rituals such as this baptism. See Lattouf, *Women, Education and Socialization*.

³⁹⁰ Interview posted at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a66Fvp29Tb0>, last viewed December 6, 2011.

³⁹¹ Sister Febronia is the current mother superior of the Monastery of Saydnaya.

The commandment to baptize all nations is classically and universally rooted in the Great Commission (Matt 28:16–20) as emphasized by ecumenical documents such as *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)*.³⁹² Remarkably, in this context, baptism is interpreted in relation to the Song of Mary (Luke 1:46–55). The indiscriminate baptismal practice found in Saydnaya is not only explained in light of the Magnificat; it is also surrounded, hosted, and called for by the images and apparitions of the Virgin Mary.

In his travel narrative *From the Holy Mountain*, the historian and travel novelist William Dalrymple recounts his stop in Saydnaya and his conversation with the nun Takla.

I remarked on the number of Muslims in the congregation. Was it all unusual, I asked.

“The Muslims come here because they want babies,” said the nun simply. “Our Lady has shown her power and healed many of the Muslims. Those people started to talk about her and now more Muslims come here than Christians”

...

“Sometimes the Muslims promise to christen a child born through the Mother of God’s intervention. This happens less frequently than it used to, but of course we like it when it does.”³⁹³

In Dalrymple’s account, sister Takla continues to speak about those Muslims who do not go as far as baptizing their so-conceived children in the monastery. They do however give back something. They either offer goods such as olive oil or a slaughtered sheep to the monastery, or they offer their children later as servants or cooks for the monastery.

Mona Mikhail writes that “[w]omen in the Arab Middle East, whether they be Muslim or Christian, have traditionally been the conduit of vow-making.”³⁹⁴ These vows tend to bring women from all denominations to the same places to perform the same acts. The intentions of the vows made by these women are also similar. Egyptian sociologist M. A. Khamis notes that these intentions can be ‘for themselves (the women) or their husbands to

³⁹² World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper no. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982) B1.

³⁹³ William Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain: A Journey in the Shadow of Byzantium* (London: HarperCollins, 1997) 188–90.

³⁹⁴ Mona Mikhail, *Seen and Heard: A Century of Arab Women in Literature and Culture* (Northampton, Mass.: Olive Branch Press, 2004) 39.

become fertile, for the relief of physical and mental impairments, for the cure of sick children, . . . for the marriage of a spinster daughter”.³⁹⁵ Though these reasons listed pertain specifically to the case of Egyptian women, they are also found commonly among Lebanese and Syrian women. Metropolitan Khodr of Mount Lebanon describes Antiochian piety, noting that “there is one religion underlying all denominations (in the Middle East) and it is the obsession with the miraculous and its pillars are the pledges towards the healing of the sick as if Man and God are in a negotiation process. The miracle requires a pledge and the fulfillment of the pledge as required.”³⁹⁶

This religion of the miraculous, as Khodr states, could account partly for the similar practices and intentions found among the array of believers visiting Saydnaya. Some priests and pastors interviewed attributed these practices (both those on the part of the monastery and those of the believers), to ignorance and superstition. Yet the fact remains that a place like Saydnaya offers enough fluidity and flexibility for people such as the group of liturgically-hybrid women studied here to find physical expression of their undetermined liturgical lives and to find healing. Getting to the remote village of Saydnaya is already a journey full of movement. Going up to the monastery, visiting it, and participating in its rituals are dynamic motion-filled activities. However, Saydnaya’s unquestioning acceptance of people from all denominations and its offer and adaptation of baptism to those requesting it gives it a flexibility that makes it attractive to a wide variety of people.

IV. Baptism of Another Kind?

Saydnaya is known to be *the* place for special baptisms. Though baptism is performed in the Antiochian Orthodox tradition, in an Antiochian Orthodox monastery and by a priest, it has an extra dimension and various layers.

The Orthodox Church officially teaches and emphasizes that ‘baptism is the divine sacrament of belonging, the sacrament that seals membership in God’s people,’³⁹⁷ and that it is not a private family matter but is essentially congregational.³⁹⁸ However, baptism as seen in Saydnaya seems to be primarily a private response to the gracious work of God in the life of a particular family. Through baptism the family’s primary intent is to *embody its*

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 41.

³⁹⁶ Georges Khodr, "نفس أنطاكية في تدينها" في تاريخ كنيسة أنطاكية للروم الأرثوذكس: أية خصوصية؟ *Nafs Antaqya fi tadayouniha Tareekh Kanisat Antaqya lil room al orthodox. Ayat khosousya?* (Balamand: Balamand, 1999) 99.

³⁹⁷ Ignatius IV, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, *Orthodoxy and the Issues of our Time*, trans. S. O’Sullivan (Balamand: Publications of the University of Balamand, 2006) 136.

³⁹⁸ Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974) 8.

faith and thanksgiving through a physical act that involves dramatic enactment, water, oil, candles, and processions. The concept of *belonging* to the physical Antiochian Orthodox Church for many is absent from this particular act. Doctrinal confessions³⁹⁹ and denominational identification are secondary in this context, making it possible for a Muslim, a Protestant or Syriac Orthodox Christian, to have his or her child baptized in the Antiochian Orthodox Church.

In a regular local Antiochian Orthodox church, priests are particular about the denomination of the parents and godparents of the child. Patriarch Ignatius IV stresses that ‘Baptism is not only an immersion but it requires faith’.⁴⁰⁰ Yet in the context of the monastery, the door is open: it seems that nothing matters other than the intention of those present, and though an official baptismal certificate can be issued after the short ceremony, this does not entail membership in the Church. Such a baptism can remain an isolated event in the life of the baptized, and he or she might grow up to be unaware of it.

In reality, many families celebrate two baptisms: one as a way of honoring a pledge made in return for what is requested, and one official baptism of membership in the local church. This is the case in many of the Protestant families studied here where the mother is non-Protestant. The family would baptize privately in Saydnaya and then later on officially in their own church. The pledged baptism thus carries another meaning.

This hospitable attitude toward baptism, however unorthodox it may seem at first, is rooted in solid Antiochian Orthodox theological grounds. Eastern Orthodox pneumatology—in general—‘is foundational for the recognition of God’s presence in history, in communities of living faiths and ideologies’⁴⁰¹ outside of Christianity. In addition, the Antiochian Orthodox theology of religion as presented by the Patriarch Ignatius IV, and more clearly by Metropolitan Khodr, sees in the concept of *logos spermatikos*⁴⁰² a more inclusive approach to people of other faiths. Khodr considers that

³⁹⁹ Taking into consideration Valognes’ remark that the Antiochian Church is less preoccupied with dogmas than others, see Jean-Pierre Valognes, *Vie et Mort des Chrétiens D’Orient, des Origines à nos Jours* (Paris: Librairie Aethème Fayard, 1994) 292.

⁴⁰⁰ Ignatius IV, *Orthodoxy and the Issues of our Time*, 136.

⁴⁰¹ Rima Barsoum, “Christian Self Understanding in Relations to Islam: A Summary Report Of the International Intra-Christian Consultation” Geneva, 18–20 October, 2008” (Geneva: WCC, 2008) 9 (summary of an “Orthodox View” by Fr. Emmanuel Clapsis). See <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/christianidentity-in-pluralistic-societies/christian-self-understanding-in-relation-to-islam.html>.

⁴⁰² “Logos spermatikos” was first introduced by Justin Martyr (103–65), born in today’s Nablus (Palestine). The concept is thus not alien to the area or to the Eastern Church.

the mission of the church is ‘to awaken the dormant Christ in the night of other religions’⁴⁰³ and thus provides the context within which such an unconventional indiscriminate offer of baptism can be possible. Both the Holy Spirit and the Logos in this theological environment are active beyond the limits of the Church and ‘prior to explicit affirmation of Jesus as Lord and Savior’.⁴⁰⁴

Moreover, Khodr underlines that God is not indifferent to the suffering of people regardless of their religion and he takes their side whoever they are.⁴⁰⁵ In the same spirit, the nuns perceive their role as taking the side of those suffering and anointing them with blessed oil. As far as the monastery and its nuns are concerned, all Christians from all denominations receive full and valid baptism. Regardless of the denomination of the parents, babies are immersed, chrismated, and receive holy communion. Their names are inscribed in the registry and they can receive a certificate of baptism that entitles them to be considered Orthodox Christians. Therefore, in principle, there would be no need for the family to seek a second baptism.⁴⁰⁶

In the case of Muslim, Druze, and in former years Jewish children, the situation is different. When the babies presented are not from Christian families, the nuns discretely mark the slip of paper bearing the name of the child with an “X” in the corner. The priest then knows that he has to perform the abridged version of baptism. Many parts of the liturgy are skipped, and the child is immersed in water but does not receive chrismation or holy communion. Instead, he or she is anointed with blessed oil.⁴⁰⁷ ‘Immersion in water alone, or strict baptism alone, does not make these children Christian,’ explained Father Agapios, a local priest in Lebanon. “It is through chrismation and communion that they are considered Christian and receive the Holy Spirit”; baptism by immersion is only ‘for re-clothing in Christ and for fortifying the child against evil and all its powers.’⁴⁰⁸ A blessing is thus given to the baptized child without breaching Orthodox baptismal theology.

Whether it is a full Orthodox baptism or a truncated one, the fact remains that all the faithful seeking baptism at Saydnaya participate in a similar ritual that binds them

⁴⁰³ Antoine Fleyfel, *La Théologie Contextuelle Arabe, Modèle Libanais* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2011) 180.

⁴⁰⁴ Barsoum, “Christian self understanding in relation to Islam,” 9.

⁴⁰⁵ Fleyfel, *La Théologie Contextuelle Arabe*, 181.

⁴⁰⁶ It is important to note here that the churches that perform the “second” baptism are not aware of the first baptism and do not thus breach *BEM*’s recommendations. This double baptism is not based on the parents’ theological mistrust in either of the sacraments, but because the baptisms are viewed as fulfilling different purposes.

⁴⁰⁷ Instead of chrism, oil and balm is used.

⁴⁰⁸ This is in agreement with Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 115–21.

unknowingly into a common expression of religiosity. While the faithful are usually unaware of this bond, the nuns are more conscious of it and consider their task in bringing all those denominations and people into the monastery to be an ecumenical one. Unaware of such documents as *BEM* and other baptismal discussions, the nuns navigate this ritual complex according to and based on their common Antiochian Orthodox convictions.

V. Healing Passage

For the Antiochian Orthodox and Maronite women married to Protestant men who are under consideration in this study, baptism at Saydnaya facilitates a crossing of some sort. It is a crossing both for the babies and for the women who leave behind their suffering and want to mark this moment as a new time. In his typology of religious teleographies,⁴⁰⁹ Tweed describes how religious acts can function both in transporting and transforming ways: the type of crossing depends on the horizon imagined. ‘*Transporting* traditions imagine that horizon between this world and another world’,⁴¹⁰ whereas *transforming* traditions ‘imagine the ultimate horizon as a personal or social limit’.⁴¹¹ When the crossing involves a change in location such as death or encounter with the other world, it is labeled a ‘transporting’ crossing.

However, when the crossing involves a change in condition such as purification, reform or healing, this becomes a ‘transforming’ event or act. When passing through Saydnaya and moving in its fluid space, the babies and their mothers both undergo transformation. The babies go through the Christian ritual of initiation; the women experience healing and liberation. For the women this rite becomes a rite of passage between illness and health.⁴¹²

The social stigma of childlessness is heavy in the Middle East and weighs mostly on the women. Having girls only, though less painful, still positions the mother in an unfavorable light in society and in the extended family. Once released from such social burdens by either conceiving or having a boy, the baptism in Saydnaya—besides being an act of thanksgiving and a fulfillment of a pledge—marks a public healing and liberation. Here healing is not to be confused with curing. What is at stake, besides physical disease, is illness. Illness, according to Grimes, is a culturally dependent perception of disease.⁴¹³ Baptism in Saydnaya is for healing a social and psychological illness or disturbance, and

⁴⁰⁹ Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 152.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 153.

⁴¹² Grimes, *Ritual Criticism*, 119.

⁴¹³ Ibid., 121.

restoring the woman by publicly reconnecting her to the “normal” social order. After engaging in the ritual, the woman is no longer stigmatized or blamed; she can now parade in the baptismal procession with her head held high. The baptism is as much about the baby being baptized as it is about his or her now proud mother.

The weeping, the tears, the fasting, and the pilgrimages that have been expressions of her long-lasting emotions of sorrow and disorientation, are somehow washed away in the waters of this baptism. A transformative crossing seems to occur as well in situations where sick children are cured, bringing healing to their mothers. Many women interviewed for this study told how they keep visiting Saydnaya because of such miracles. Visiting the monastery is not only a way to pay a debt, but is also a reminder of the blessings received and the lives changed.

Many of the women in this research experience an extra crossing in this place and through this act. One of the interviewees, Antoinette, explains: ‘In Saydnaya, the priest does not ask about the denomination of the baby. He grabs and dips’. Since the priest and the nuns welcome everyone for baptism, the women in question find a spiritual home. Because Saydnaya is in such a remote place, a place outside of ordinary life, baptizing a child there does not seem to be as problematic for a Protestant father or family. For that brief moment, the woman finds a place where she is accepted with all her denominational complexities and where she can do what she wants to do freely.

VI. Evanescent but Portable Home

Saydnaya, which is but a station in the journey, becomes for a brief moment, a home. No one goes to Saydnaya to stay. It is not a congregation of which one becomes a member, nor a church that can be visited regularly (except for the residents of Saydnaya itself). For the women in question, the visit or the baptism makes it a temporary home where their spirituality can be expressed. This is not to be seen in opposition to their membership or understanding of the Protestant church. All the respondents expressed clearly how blessed they were with the Protestant church, its spirituality and theology. All believe that the Protestant baptism is a true and sufficient sacrament. However, Saydnaya and its baptism add vital aspects to their fluid spirituality. Its connectedness to history, its structure in motion, and its feminine dimensions are valuable characteristics.

Saydnaya is a place of orientation in disorientation. When these women visit Saydnaya, they are affirming continuity despite diversity by revisiting history. Time in Saydnaya seems to be slower and of another nature than everyday life. A pilgrimage to Saydnaya becomes not only a trip to another place outside the usual, outside the cities and

the towns, but in a sense a trip to another time. The rocks, the building, the icons, the nuns, though regularly changing and adapting to the environment, seem to be in a frozen timeline. Knowing that this site is considered to be the place where Abel's grave is to be found, and that it carries archeological footprints from the Stone Age and artifacts from Aramean, Greek, Syrian, Roman and Arab times, places the women face to face with their own multifaceted history.

Many women interviewed for this study voiced how the knowledge and feeling of being connected to the apostles, church fathers and church history gave them confidence. The load of personal choice and individual commitment that they experience in the Protestant churches is eased as they renew their contact with a much older church history than "where Luther started."⁴¹⁴ Though they experience joy and freedom in the Protestant call for personal choice, they also need to "rest"⁴¹⁵ from the claim it makes on them. In Saydnaya, they do not have to decide. Church history, the experience of all those around them, and the unchanging nature of the place, have decided for them. Faith does not depend on one person.

A second aspect that makes Saydnaya attractive is its built-in call to motion and embodiment: its situation, structure and mode of baptism invite multi-dimensional motion. Women who come from Eastern demonstrative traditions are both edified and intimidated by the verbosity of the Protestants. One of the frustrations expressed by the women during the interviews was the inability to find adequate vocabulary to express their faith and spirituality. Physical movement and objects are the languages with which they feel most comfortable when faced with strong emotions. The baptismal procession, the dipping, the washing, and the anointing take the place of words of praise and prayer. The language of motion is a language they master, even if they reinterpret some of it in light of their new Protestant context.

Third, and most importantly, Saydnaya is a feminine place. It is a monastery dedicated to the Virgin Mary, hosted by nuns and specializing in women's issues. Though in the Lebanese Protestant Church the women find a liberating space to be active agents and to assume leadership positions, they do miss the feminine elements of the Orthodox liturgy and the divine world. God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Bible and the pastors bring an all-male flavor to the Protestant Sunday liturgy and to the rituals at hand. Women,

⁴¹⁴ Nana, interview with the author, December 26, 2009.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

who grew up in the warmth of a feminine Church⁴¹⁶ where the image of the Virgin and child is central, miss this warmth in a sober Reformed setting. Though Saydnaya is by no means a place only for women, much of its focus relates to Arab women's issues. Infertility, pregnancy, childbirth, motherhood, and all their complications come to the fore and are freely expressed there. The women thus find a home for their feminine struggles and a spiritual home for their bodies.

As they pass through Saydnaya, this home becomes a portable⁴¹⁷ home. The women appropriate Saydnaya and "carry" it with them to their other places to be summoned up at other times. It is often kept in the imagination to be recreated in future private and personal rites. Many of the women described how in times of anxiety or distress they mentally visit Saydnaya; they recreate the candle-lit *Shaghoura* and fall on their knees. In the disorientation of their hybrid liturgical lives, the women find orientation when the many churches and cultures to which they belong stream through one point. Their liquid liturgical life meets other liquid lives to stream out again towards other destinations.

VII. Momentum

It is in the multidimensional motion of ritual at Saydnaya that these women deal with illness and healing. And just like an object possesses kinetic energy on account of its motion, it is in their momentum that they acquire energy to keep going. The passage and crossing that occurs in Saydnaya and similar places is not of a final nature. On the contrary, it is a passage that gives enough energy to get to the next passage. Though the Saydnaya baptism is not repeatable, it is a renewable ritual. In other words, the same experience of crossing and healing is renewed in other places and through other rituals.

Among these women, the quest for healing (just like their long-term emotions) is persistent. Though the illnesses change, the healing is never complete. The crying continues and returns and the desire for movement to deal with their "deep-seated anguishing quests"⁴¹⁸ goes on.

⁴¹⁶ See Georges Khodr, "The Mother of God the Theotokos and Her Role in God's Plan for our Salvation" *The Ecumenical Review* 60.1-2 (January-April, 2008).

⁴¹⁷ In agreement with what White describes in *A History of Women in Christian Worship*, 39.

⁴¹⁸ Mikhail, *Seen and Heard*, 48.



The Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, *Shemlan (Lebanon)*

Photo: R. Nasrallah

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Chapter 7: Which Mary?

Eastern Christian women bringing their Mary into the Lebanese Protestant Church

A Disturbing Piety

It was six o'clock in the morning on a camping site in Mount Lebanon when a little car pulled up and the window rolled down. Fuad who came to pick up his son exceptionally early from the summer camp, couldn't hold back a pressing question. "Did you hear" he addressed me, knowing that I am a theologian in liturgical studies, "they are singing the Ave Maria in our Protestant Church now. What is this nonsense? Did we go back to the Middle Ages? Or is the cult of Astarte and Isis creeping back on us? Tell me what is your opinion."⁴¹⁹

Fuad's anxiety and confusion is well understandable. Few Protestant Churches in Lebanon have found themselves recently allowing the Ave Maria to be sung by a soloist on certain occasions. Weddings and funerals are the two main occasions when this could happen. Torn between pastoral and theological concerns, the Ave Maria has been 'permitted' with one small change: instead of "Ora pro nobis" (pray for us) the text was changed to "Ora cum nobis" (pray with us).

This research looks at the women who unknowingly are responsible for this 'innovation'. These women come originally from Antiochian Orthodox Churches (Atiyyeh 2005:293-316; Hunt 2007:73-93) or Maronite Churches (O'Mahony 2010; Galadza 2007:291-318) and by marriage join the Lebanese Protestant Churches⁴²⁰ (Murre-van den Berg 2006; Badr 2005:713-726). Intense liturgical moments such as weddings and funerals reveal Mary's position for them. However, though at other points in the church's life she seems to retreat to her normal 'Protestant size', Mary remains differently active and present for these

⁴¹⁹ August, 2013.

⁴²⁰ Lebanese Social norms dictate that women join their husband's church upon marriage. Though there is never an official conversion or initiation required, the women join socially as this will be the church of their children.

women. In this paper we wish to investigate the place and meaning of Mary in the faith and piety of the considered women. Contemporary discussion around Mary seems to presuppose a choice between two Marian camps (de Haardt 2011; Spretnak 2004). On one side, a human Mary as presented by Protestant Churches (Kreitzer 2004; Sabra 2001) in general and by many feminist theologians (Johnson 2006; Warner 1976); on the other, a ‘cosmic’ Mary cherished in popular piety, pilgrimage sites (Turner and Turner 2011; Barnard, Post and Rose 2011; Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans 2009) and classical – pre-Vatican II– Catholicism.

In this paper, we look at the lived faith of the women mentioned as seen in their everyday life (de Certeau 1988). Knowing that they actively belong to multiple ecclesial traditions⁴²¹ that have opposing views of Mary (Pelikan 1996; Rube 2009), we wish to investigate how they appropriate her. By doing this, we heed the advice of theologian and religious scholar Maaïke de Haardt who advocates a start from devotional practices (de Haardt 2013:169). De Haardt underlines that “in concrete devotional praxis, forms of appropriation and significations take place that transcend the frameworks and images of doctrine and theology” (de Haardt 2011:174). Therefore, we first introduce the women. We then locate the discussion in its historical developments and its current debate. Next we look at images of Mary that the women considered highlight as meaningful and try to understand what theological themes they disclose. Finally we try to answer the question: what is the role of Mary in the piety of these women?

“I love her”: The Oretic Pole⁴²² of Mary

It is important to start by highlighting that the women considered in this research do not form a physical group. They are individuals– often unaware of the massive presence of others in the same situation– who found themselves due to marriage, sitting on the pews of a Reformed Church. Belonging to liturgical traditions that are miles apart in their discourse and world view, the women slowly and spontaneously mold their own personalized

⁴²¹ It is important to underline here that in most cases the women maintain membership in their mother church and keep moving physically and liturgically/theologically between and in-between more than one tradition.

⁴²² Turner and Turner highlight the Oretic pole of images of Mary as they connect to the heart. See Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*, p.146.

spiritual life and practices. In order to understand what happens to the liturgical lives⁴²³ of these women in this particular situation, ethnographic methods were used. An intimate knowledge of the field coupled with in depth interviews, participant observation over a period of five years, and analysis of biographical essays give insight into the lives of 27 women⁴²⁴. In other articles we have described and explained how their liturgical lives become fluid liturgical scapes⁴²⁵ characterized by experimentation and movement. The women physically move between various churches and traditions constructing unusual and flexible liturgical spaces through which they can find healing⁴²⁶ and experience divine presence⁴²⁷. They construct their own liturgical calendar by selecting feasts and fasts that correspond with their new convictions. Their homes become laboratories where objects and rituals from various traditions are mixed and reinterpreted. Living in Protestant homes and enthusiastically embracing much of the Protestant faith, the women find themselves continuously revisiting theological concepts and reinterpreting them. Distance is taken from various issues as they are evaluated and much is dismissed as unnecessary both in the mother tradition and in the new Protestant tradition. However, one subject seems to stubbornly resist the flow: the Virgin Mary.

Entering the homes of these women one is likely to find an image of the Virgin Mary in one form or another and in various degrees. Antoinette, one of the women, decorated a piano in her living room with a dozen religious pictures. Among them she had an Eastern Orthodox icon of the Hodigitria, a framed print of Our lady of Medigorje, a white plastic bust of Mary, as well as other unusual Marian images. Over a cupboard, she placed a gypsum statue of the Immaculate Conception. Next to her bed, Antoinette had a plastic water bottle in the shape of Our Lady of Lourdes. During one of the interviews her daughter walked in

⁴²³ By liturgical lives we refer to worship practices that are not confined to the walls of the church. See Barnard, Marcel; Cilliers, Johan and Wepener, Cas (2014). *Worship in the Network Culture. Liturgical-Ritual Studies, Fields and Methods, Concepts and Metaphors*. (Liturgia Condenda). Leuven-Paris-Walpole.

⁴²⁴ The women considered were selected from different Protestant churches in four different areas in Lebanon. Many are highly educated, among them a medical doctor, a dentist, a pharmacist and three women holding PhDs in various fields. They are mostly active urban women aged between 30 and 65 (at the exception of one 70 year old). The interviews and biographies were conducted specifically for the purpose of this research and are saved in the archives of the Protestant Theological University, Amsterdam. Throughout the research the women are referred to using pseudonyms.

⁴²⁵ These concepts are developed with the help of theories of culture such as Bauman, Zygmunt (2000). *Liquid Modernity* Cambridge: Polity and theories of religion such as Tweed, Thomas (2008). *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

⁴²⁶ Nasrallah, Murre-van den Berg and Barnard, 'Kinetics of Healing: Protestant Women Pledging Baptism in Saydnaya Orthodox Monastery' in *Studia Liturgica* (42), 2012, pp. 270-284.

⁴²⁷ Nasrallah, Murre-van den Berg, Brinkman and Barnard 'Itinerant Feasting: Eastern Christian Women Negotiating (Physical) Presence in the Celebration of Easter' in *Exchange* 42 (2013), pp. 319-342.

wearing a bracelet made of mini icons of the virgin. Antoinette explained how she puts pictures under the mattresses of her children, inside kitchen cupboards and on the dashboard of the car. In contrast, Layla, another respondent, had only one visible picture of Mary, discreetly hanging in a hallway between the bedrooms. The picture is cut out of a Protestant devotional calendar and depicts the flight to Egypt. Najat, on the other hand, saw the Virgin Mary twice in her dreams. A sweet, beautiful woman with an unforgettable voice appeared to her and performed extra-ordinary signs.

Broaching the topic of Mary with the women during the interviews or the request for a spiritual biography was very tricky. While all other questions concerning prayer, feasts, fasting, or rituals could be introduced naturally, the topic of Mary had to be introduced with a warning and explanation. “Don’t be afraid of this question”, I found myself saying. A Protestant theologian asking about Mary can sound threatening. The women often recognized and identified with the tension I introduced when asking this question. “This is the one issue people (other Christians) ask about when I say ‘Protestant’” said Lara, “do they believe in the Virgin Mary?” They always ask me”⁴²⁸. Nana also explained “the only thing that they (other Christians) accuse us of is that the Virgin Mary is not at all present in the (Protestant) Church”⁴²⁹. But though the women believe that the Protestant Church can benefit from a bit more “Mary” in it, they are not distressed about it, because as Najat puts it “The Virgin is everywhere”⁴³⁰.

The term ‘Virgin Mary’ evoked the feelings of love and tenderness. As the women started talking about her, not only did they almost unanimously say at some point “I love her”, but even their bodily posture, facial expressions and voice changed to match a tenderness that sometimes brought actual tears. Love for Mary is unquestionable. Her image, who she is, and how one should relate to her were on the other hand expressed differently by the various women. Not only were there slight differences in emphasis related to the different traditions the women originally come from (Antiochian Orthodox or Maronite), but personal variations were also visible. Many women found it necessary to explain in what way their view of the Virgin Mary differs from others in their mother church or society at large. Most explained that their relationship with Mary has changed over time due to

⁴²⁸ Interview, August 2013.

⁴²⁹ Interview, December 2009.

⁴³⁰ Interview, December 2009.

contact with the Protestant Church. Moreover, in all discussions the women made clear that they are highly aware and sensitive to the Reformed position. However, in all this Mary hardly ever ‘shrunk’ enough to fit the Protestant size. The ‘many faces’ seen by the women remain larger and different from the image and space presented in the Protestant Church. And it is these ‘faces’ that we wish to understand in this paper.

Mary and her Many Faces

Literature on Mary abounds, much of it highlights her many different faces, the development of the Marian piety, and the various titles and functions she has occupied. Mary is a polyvalent and powerful symbol (Hermkens, Jansen, and Notermans 2009:3; Kreitzer 2004:3). In her book, Beth Kreitzer (2004) points to both Paul Ricoeur and Victor Turner who underline that symbols such as the Virgin Mary “have a ‘capacity to refer simultaneously to many levels of experience’ and they allow ‘users to appropriate that to which the symbols point’”. We will hence first look at the kinds of Mary present for the women under consideration in their current Lebanese context before we highlight their personal appropriation of her (in part IV).

A Hodigitria with a Lily

Unlike in other areas of the world where piety to Mary is strong, such as Latin America⁴³¹ (Brinkman 2009:273–286; Irrazabal, Ross and Wacker 2008:96–105), the Philippines and Africa (Fouda 2008:87–95), Mary is not an imported figure but is very indigenous to the Middle East (Goudard 1993). She is the next door neighbor. As early as the third century, traces of Marian devotion are found in Eastern Churches only to be amplified and anchored at the council of Ephesus in 431 at the pronouncement of the title of *Theotokos*. The Eastern Orthodox Church is not only visually⁴³² enveloped by the *Theotokos*, its entire liturgy and liturgical year are meshed with her name (Kasselouri-Hatzivassiliadi 2008:57–65). The elaborate feast of the Dormition of our Lady, preceded by fifteen days of fasting, is still the spiritual and social highlight of the summer season. Shrines and pilgrimage sites dedicated to Mary are visited by the faithful from every tradition and religion. Yet Metr. George Khodr, eminent Orthodox theologian, underlines that in the Eastern Orthodox tradition “Mary is

⁴³¹ Where synthesis is made between existing feminine images of God, *Pachamama*, and Mary images.

⁴³² With frescos, icons and mosaic.

never separated from her Son, either in the hymnological domain or in the pictorial” (Khodr 2008:29, emphasis original). Popular icons found massively today in homes and churches such as the Hodigitria, Eleusa and Oranta⁴³³ testify to this.

However, this rich, ancient and diverse Mariology of the East runs parallel and in fusion with other images of Mary. With the arrival of the Jesuit Missionaries in the seventeenth century, the common two dimensional artistic representations of the East were deemed naïve and were immediately supplemented by a different kind of art from Italian and French provenance (Heyberger 1989:535). Another Mary was thus massively introduced both in the arts and in the piety. This Mary is more realistic and feminine yet she stands mostly alone without her son. New themes were ushered in those images concerning both the theology and the attributes of Mary. We name Mary’s Ascension (in place of her Dormition), the Immaculate Conception, the Lady of the Rosary (Heyberger 2003:41), as well as the crowning of the virgin. In those images she is depicted in association with meekness, purity and chastity. All those elements were appropriated by the Eastern traditions sympathetic with Rome who created their own blend of Eastern and Western piety. This blend is seen most graphically in a Melkite Icon of the “Virgin of the Rose” depicting the traditional Eastern theme of mother and child of the Hogiditria holding a lily: a Western devotional symbol of chastity (Heyberger 2003:46).

In popular piety these different images run both in parallel and in merged forms. With the new dogmas and apparitions of the 19th and 20th centuries, devotion to her increased exponentially and many other Marys were added to the diorama. Not only did the virgin appear to the Western pious in Fatima and Lourdes, she also appeared in Jerusalem and in Cairo with major impacts both sociologically and spiritually (Jansen 2005:152). Her apparitions and miracles fed national feelings and reinforced political positions, particularly during times of war. In the beginning of the twentieth century, a statue of the Virgin Mary weighing 15 tons of bronze was erected on a mountain overlooking the Lebanese coast to commemorate 50 years of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. This French-made statue, *our Lady of Harissa*, in its physical weight, size and popular

⁴³³ Hodigitria: Mary with the child Jesus on her arm. Elusa: Mary holding Jesus close to her face, cheek to cheek. Oranta: Mary, arms spread, with Jesus depicted inside a circle on her abdomen or chest.

visibility illustrates the place and shape Marian devotion took in the twentieth century⁴³⁴; a size too formidable to be shaken by Vatican II's modernizing enterprise, its more Biblical position towards Mary and her liturgical retrenching. A statue this size does not only reflect popular piety⁴³⁵ but underlines the Maronite Church's Marian liturgical and ecclesial tradition that underlines that "through her, salvation is achieved" (Maronite Patriarchal Synod 2006:434).

Ecclesial decisions concerning Mary's revisited position, whether in Rome or in the Middle East did not materialize as such in popular devotion. People continue to appropriate Mary in their own ways.

The Reformed Mary

In contrast Mary in the Lebanese Reformed Church is (supposedly) almost inexistent. Devotion to Mary and her place in Christian faith were one of the first points of divergence between the Catholic Church and the 16th century Reformers. Though Luther, and the early reformers⁴³⁶ kept some form of reverence to Mary and held on to many of her attributes, they rejected basic Catholic beliefs and practices. They held on to her title as 'mother of God', to her virginity (even her perpetual virginity), to the parallel between her and Eve and between her and the Church. However, they rejected her intercession, her power and authority, and her freedom from sin. They eliminated Marian feasts and forbade prayer to her (Kreitzer 2004:3-26). Succeeding generations of Reformers were even more severe in their treatment of Marian devotions (Freeman 2004: 228-238). Yet, they extracted from her image a universal model for the obedient and chaste wife and mother (Kreitzer 2004:140-141), while keeping their critical position towards Mary herself even as a woman⁴³⁷. The piety that arrived to the East with the Anglo-American missionaries in the 19th century was focused on Jesus, on repentance and conversion. Mary played no role in that piety. However, upon encountering the Lebanese 'excessive and superstitious'⁴³⁸

⁴³⁴ As well as her political and sectarian power where different political parties appropriate her protection and nationalism is tied to her veneration.

⁴³⁵ This pilgrimage site is visited by people of all faiths and religions- Christian, Druze and Muslim- from the entire region.

⁴³⁶ Zwingli for example held on to the singing of the Ave Maria (its first part), see Tavard, George H. (1996). *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press: 103-133.

⁴³⁷ Ironically, she was even seen as having failed to live up to the Victorian image of womanhood that she had inspired; see Engelhardt, Carol Marie (2004). "Mother Mary and Victorian Protestants". In Swanson, *The Church and Mary*: 298-307.

⁴³⁸ Keeping in mind that the Protestant missionaries arrived to Lebanon and started contact with the local Christians in a time labelled by scholars as the 'golden age of Mary', when a new dogma about Mary (Immaculate conception, 1854) was just declared and many major apparitions announced.

popular devotion in the ‘mission field’, they adamantly condemned it (Makdisi 2008:87). Marian devotional practices, among others, gave rise to anti-Catholic polemic language and mutual accusations of idolatry between the missionaries and the local Eastern Christian authorities (Murre-van den Berg 2006:63-80). On the other hand, the missionaries became fascinated by the correspondence they saw between the natives and their (the missionaries’) idea of the first century inhabitants of the ‘land’. They would then associate their image of Mary (and other Biblical figures) with scenes of poor and suffering mothers of the Orient⁴³⁹. Considered as the first of the believers, Mary’s image in sketches and illustrations was that of a Palestinian or Jordanian peasant in simple clothing. The Protestants became known for their humble image and rare mention of her- even sometimes aversion to her image- which gave rise to many a discussion on the ecumenical level (Sabra 2001:171-188). Though generally there is today a more favorable Marian atmosphere in many streams of Protestant Churches (van Biema 2005; George 2004:100-122; Spretnak 2004:148; de Haardt 2011:170) worldwide, on the popular level this topic causes friction and alienation between Protestants and non-Protestants, as testified by the women in this research.

‘Dangerous Ally’?

All these different faces of Mary have one thing in common: they are faces of a woman. Whether fair skinned blue eyed, olive skinned and two dimensional or a photograph of a Palestinian peasant she is loaded with issues that reflect on womanhood.

Feminists in general look at Mary suspiciously. The 19th century (Catholic) image of Mary that continues to live and flower today under various forms is unacceptable for (Western) feminist theologians, liberation theologians as well as historical-critical exegetes. Her presence and image are associated with oppression, hierarchy, ecclesial politics, nationalism, and outdated and undesirable gender paradigms of subordination, passivity and receptivity. “The passive, obedient Marian figure whose lack of experience is taken as a sign of holiness; the woman whose sole purpose in life is to bear a child (...); the silent embodiment of the so-called feminine ideal of nurturing and self-giving” (Irrazabal, Ross

⁴³⁹ One can see that in sketches and illustrations of the Bible lands, see Murre-van den Berg, Heleen (2006). “William McClure Thomson’s The Land and the Book (1859): Pilgrimage and Mission in Palestine”. In Murre-van den Berg, Heleen ed. *New Faith in Ancient Lands. Western Missions in the Middle East in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*. Leiden: Brill: 43-63; Jansen, Willy “Marian Images”, In Hermkens, Jansen and Notermans, *Moved by Mary*, p.43.

and Wacker 2008:11), seems to work against the 21st century idea of womanhood and dignity. Even more, Mariology is considered pre-modern. In fact it is said that Mary was being used as a weapon against rationalism and “a force of resistance and reconstruction of modernity” (Irrazabal, Ross and Wacker 2008:7). Devotion and piety around her are classified by some as *kitsch*, coated with superstition, relying on mythology rather than texts and promoting female dependence via intercession.

However, Vatican II’s repackaging or “shrinking” of Mary, as Charlene Spretnak puts it, and her presentation as a ‘biblical’ and more human character⁴⁴⁰, was welcomed by many Catholic feminists. In her more ‘modern’ outlook she could be considered “truly our sister” (Johnson 2008:11–18), and play a role of liberation and social justice. ‘Miriam’, “a Jewish woman of her time, belonging to a people colonized by the Roman Empire” (Irrazabal, Ross and Wacker 2008:7) is a more promising figure for scholars. Even the Quranic Mary brings new challenges for interreligious studies and dialog (Frederiks 2010:126–140; Jansen and Khül 2008:295–311; Hagemann 2008:66–76).

However, though this is the main choice for (Western) feminists it is not the only choice. Maaïke de Haardt and Charlene Spretnak are some of the exceptional voices who call for a turn in the other direction precisely for the benefit of feminist theology. For them a larger more cosmic Mary, a ‘Biblical-plus’ Mary as Spretnak calls her, or a Divine Mary is more felicitous theologically and spiritually. For these scholars, devotional practices around Mary are the ground where a new Mariology might be possible⁴⁴¹ rather than in doctrinal developments or ecclesial pronouncements. And it is to those devotional practices that we now turn to look at the Mariology of the women we consider in this research asking ourselves: which Mary is being constructed and what does she say theologically?

Key Images of Mary

We have shown so far how the image of Mary is highly prismatic and multifaceted. In what follows, we will depict the considered women’s selective use of the images of Mary. In their ambiguous position of insiders/outsideers in both (or more) traditions, these women

⁴⁴⁰ In keeping with the trend of Vatican II and its stress on Biblical texts and sources, the discussion around Mary was also brought in dialog with the Biblical witness and narratives. Vatican II’s language about Mary in *Lumen Gentium* came closer than ever to a Protestant representation.

⁴⁴¹ Particularly de Haardt.

experience the freedom to select, and reinterpret images of Mary. Their selection, omission or addition of certain images of Mary, are part of their negotiation of their religious identity and convictions⁴⁴².

The scarcity of scriptural data concerning Mary makes the image of Mary rather than her story take on a powerful life. Popular piety and doctrines and dogmas work dialectically to create changing images of Mary. Therefore it is primarily her image, her visual and cultural depictions rather than her biblical narrative that confront us. It is as if Mary has broken loose of the biblical text and took on a life of her own that only kept growing and unfolding (Ross 2008:32) even as Vatican II attempted to bring her back closer to some biblical traditions.

Throughout this research it has become clear that as far as Mary is concerned, it is the image that has power. When we compared all instances when the women spoke of Jesus or God in general and when they spoke of Mary a clearly different discourse strikes us. When speaking of Jesus, the women rely on doctrine and scripture and explain using concepts. Sentences like, "Jesus is the savior", "he says knock and it shall be open", or "when you read the scripture, you know Jesus", are used. However, when speaking of the Virgin Mary, the women start with a visual image mostly of one particular Mary, and go on to qualify it with feelings and personal experiences. "Yes" started Nana who originally is a Maronite, "when we used to stand on our balcony she (Mary) used to be facing us on the Church wall, and my late mother used to like her a lot...my mother used to say 'this virgin is miraculous' (...) I know that she is with me, I feel her next to me, I love her."⁴⁴³ Trying to describe her relationship with Mary, Layla, originally Orthodox, explained "In the feast of Sayyde (Dormition of Mary), isn't there the image of the Virgin!? So yes, sometimes I pray to the Virgin Mary but very rarely, maybe once a year on the feast of the Sayyde". The name of the virgin is tightly connected to images. Reflections on her position and relationship with her are anchored in those images.

Moreover, in the midst of the many images available for the women and present in their world, homes and churches, there always seems to be one key image that overshadows

⁴⁴² In this article we chose to focus mainly on the religious and theological aspects rather than on the sociological, political, economic or purely gender aspects even if these all play clear and important roles.

⁴⁴³ Interview, December 2009.

others and that becomes the lens that colors all others. We identified three key images that seem to work each as a starting point for the women to begin talking about Mary. These images are not exclusive but help qualify Mary and accentuate some of her attributes and meanings. We roughly follow Willy Jansen's approach here as she analyses key images of Mary in Jordan. Jansen says "Their [the images'] selection is not accidental, but embedded in the historical sociopolitical structures within specific contexts" (Jansen 2009:36) and we add, in theological convictions. We shall therefore start by looking at these three kinds of key images in order to understand the meaning and position of Mary in this particular context.

The Virgin in Blue

"I grew up at home (...) and the image of the virgin, this one (hanging on the wall) – this is from the house of my grandfather from my father's side, (...) my uncle used to say she is miraculous. The look on the face of the girl child, (...) the innocence and honesty, creates in you how much you love Jesus". This is how Antoinette began to speak about her faith. A particular image of Mary, confirmed by its history and the testimony of the beloved ones, is her starting point. The image with which Antoinette opened up is a western depiction of a serene face, tilted down and turned three quarters away, wearing a dark blue veil. Only the face of the virgin is visible and the painting is not very well known. However, other women seemed to start with similar images. Dana, whose home altar hosts at its center the statue of the Immaculate Conception adorned with fresh flowers at her feet, a rosary around her neck and lit by a candle, also speaks of a key image similar to Antoinette's. Though in both homes, statues and pictures of Our Lady of Lourdes, Our Lady of Medigorje, the Immaculate Conception and Our Lady of Harissa are present, they choose to focus on less popular images. Their chosen images of western provenance and features emphasize feminine traits such as sweetness/friendliness, tenderness, compassion, etc. These features distilled from a certain image are then projected onto all other images and representations of Mary. Lara, who refuses the 'kitsch' statue of the Immaculate Conception saying "Oh no these blue statues, I don't like them at all" opts for a less known crystal made relief yet with the same feminine characteristics. She refers to her as "sweet".

These women from both Antiochian Orthodox and Maronite traditions choose for a 'blue' Mary as interpreter of their image of the virgin; yet, not the most popular 'blue' ones (even

if they do own these as well). The image they choose is that of a very feminine, soft, tender and 'beautiful' Mary. Feminists analyzing this category of images are appalled by what these images carry in their history and socio-political construction of obedience, passivity and praise of female chastity (Warner 1976:333-339). Yet for the women in question, these aspects do not come across as remarkable. What is highlighted here is Mary's accessibility as a woman. In these images, she is open and kind enough, not threatening nor too grand to talk to or to answer. "My prayers mostly go to our Lady of Ma'ouneet (Perpetual Help) of my village (...) many times I felt she was with me and answered my prayers", says Dana. She is experienced as close and relationship with her is intimate: "like mama or my sister, my friend"⁴⁴⁴ was often the analogy. "She is with me all the time" explained Youmna.

No traces of imitation or example came across in the interviews with the women. Unlike what one might expect, in these images Mary is not experienced as a role model, example or even perfect woman but as a lovely and lovable accessible companion; a 'beautiful' woman to talk to about the everyday worries that come with being a woman. A friendly "component of daily life" (Irrazabal, Ross and Wacker 2008:97).

The Virgin in Black

A second image of Mary that functions as key image is one of the sorrowful mourning, even devastated Mary. However it is not the pieta or a typical virgin dolorosa that comes in the description but a more contemporary image. We mention here Mary in the movie *The Passion of the Christ*. Nada, one of the ladies, highlighted this image and all that it carries with it as she explained:

"I grew up loving the virgin, from my grandmother⁴⁴⁵, (...)from the old priest⁴⁴⁶ in the village (...)and from maybe the monastery of the nuns⁴⁴⁷ where I was (as a student). When I started going to the Protestant Church, as if I used to hold her very sacred and venerate her and then as if I have decreased that. When I saw the movie *The Passion of the Christ* and did some reflections on the movie many times, I put myself in her place. What would I have done? I would have acted like a human being I would have ran and drew them

⁴⁴⁴ Rana, Interview, August 2010.

⁴⁴⁵ Antiochian Orthodox.

⁴⁴⁶ Antiochian Orthodox.

⁴⁴⁷ Maronite/Catholic.

away/chased them away from my son and carried the cross on his behalf, because I am a human being. Mel Gibson portrayed her in a way-- the one who enters to the depth of the scenario – he appreciates the sanctity of the virgin. Because she is not a human being like me she is a saint different from all the women and the mothers ...I went back to placing her in her own rank, the rank I had for her when I was young.(...) she was a human being but she did something no human being can do. This is why I rely on her”

This suffering aspect of Mary, seems to be an image with a lot of meaning for many of the women. Fida says “I used to pray to her, she is the mother of Jesus and a saint. Now (after joining the Protestant Church) I don’t pray to her. But now I know; she means to me ... that she was so good and pious that God chose her to be the mother of Jesus ...and ... how much she suffered, the poor soul”⁴⁴⁸.

The women often share pictures on social media –such as Facebook– recalling this theme. One of those for example, depicts a superposition of Michelangelo’s pieta with contemporary images from Syria and Lebanon of people carrying their dead children after explosions or bombardments. Others have pictures of women in black walking in funeral processions. The mourning Mary becomes thus a contemporary reality. In Spretnak’s words she “knows what a broken heart feels like, the numbness of great loss of any sort. Knows the wrenching place where tears come from. We never have to explain (as if anyone could). She knows” (Spretnak 2004:206).

A highlight of this suffering is that Mary did not choose to suffer as a heroic act but because of the relationship she had with the one to whom violence and injustice were being done. Her suffering and the way she dealt with it – as portrayed by popular culture in art, music and movies– echoes with the suffering of these women. Just like her, the bodies and lives of their beloved ones are in pain. For Nada it is her dying brother and her son’s accident, for Hind it was her kidnapped and killed brother, for Fida it is her sick grandchild, for Laura it is her suffering brother-in-law, for Mona her chronically ill husband and the list goes on. These women deeply feel their impotence towards the suffering of those close to them. Mary’s suffering as a result of Christ’s, her son’s, redemptive suffering give them both

⁴⁴⁸ Fida, interview, December 2009.

consolation and hope. “She understands” explained Nada “and she could let go because she knew what he was doing”.

The Virgin in Red

A third key image is the *Theotokos*, the icon of the mother draped in red. “I only put this image of Mary in my house (Hodigitria), because she is the mother of Jesus and I see her in relation to him” explained Leena. For many women selecting images of Mary only in the company of her son acts as a shield against what some Protestants would call ‘mariolatry’ or pagan worship of Mary. “You cannot deny that she is the mother of Jesus” explained Layla “no one can deny this”, it is in the Bible. “And the son likes that his mother is honored”, adds Nana.

However, once her motherly relation to Jesus is defended and established as ground for allowing her space in their new Protestant world, it is her motherhood in general that is meaningful for the women. “She is a mother and she understands”, explained Fida⁴⁴⁹. Fida often stands in front of the icon of the *Theotokos* at the Iconostasis, located on the left side of the Beautiful Gates and tenderly holding her grandson on her arm and close to her face. The icon of the *Theotokos*, despite being antiquated, or even because of her old ‘authenticity’, is still one of the most popular depictions of Mary. There she is not a real life woman, feminine and delicate, nor is she a suffering bereaved (despite the red veil pointing to that), but she is a mother protecting a fragile child. She is motherhood. In this image of motherhood, many of the women find an extension of their own motherhood and by contrast, its inadequacy.

Violette explained “My grandson was very prematurely born. He was hung between heaven and earth. I used to pray the whole day. I woke up praying and slept praying. (...) I would light a candle and pray “oh Virgin Mary when Jesus was born you had him in a barn, warmed by the breath of animals, please care for this boy and keep him next to you...and make him live like you did with Jesus”⁴⁵⁰.

For Nada, it was a time when she was travelling for work and political events erupted in Lebanon (summer 2006). She was unable to reach her family by phone “so I told her”, she

⁴⁴⁹ Informal chat, February 2014.

⁴⁵⁰ Violette, interview January 2010.

explained, “you act in my place, see how you are going to protect my children in your own way. You are a mother, you understand the feelings of mothers. No one like you understands the feelings of a mother”. This aspect of the image of Mary, as the mother, connects with the experience of the women. Not only does she understand what they are feeling, thinking and hoping, but she has the power to compensate for their limited humanity. They cannot be everywhere, they cannot stop evil, they cannot guide their children, but somehow she can. Desirée, incidentally a professor at the university, explained “I don’t analyze much; things I don’t understand or have logical explanations for like her virginity and so on, I don’t want to think about this, but (I) as a mother I look at her as a mother.”⁴⁵¹

These aspects of femininity, suffering and motherhood are not new in Mariology, they are rather classical. Yet these women seem to appropriate them in a very particular way. We see for example that they are not directly anchored in specific biblical texts or in the story of the young Galilean Miriam. They are free appropriations and full engagement with images from various historical periods (antiquity, 19th and 21st century), various areas of the world (the Levant, Europe and Hollywood) and various traditions (Eastern, Latin or ‘secular’). They do not refer to dogmas on either side. They are unimpressed by contemporary exegesis and hermeneutics. In addition, Mary does not function here as model, neither to the women as women or as mothers not even to the church or the believers⁴⁵² as many traditions use her symbol. Her image seems to say more about what they see in the divine rather than how they should live their life or be as women. Chastity, obedience, self-sacrifice and receptivity for instance, do not play any role. In fact, the majority of the women interviewed were assertive⁴⁵³, active, independent, and mindful of their looks. The issue here – we realize in parallel to Susan Ross’s conclusion (Ross 2008:33) – is more about God than about the women. And it is to this that we turn now.

⁴⁵¹ Desirée, interview, August 2011.

⁴⁵² As held both by the Orthodox Church, see Khodr, “The Mother of God, the *Theotokos*” and the Maronite Church, see *The Maronite Patriarchal Synod*, File 2, Text 12.

⁴⁵³ Many of the women are highly educated professionals. Among them were, for example, three women holding PhDs in various fields, as well as a medical doctor, a dentist, and a pharmacist.

A Paradox?

What do these devotional practices and experiences of Mary inform us on the theological level? Can we attribute all of these positions to psychological needs of a mother archetype in Jungian language (Ford 2004:93–113)?– a position very tempting for Protestant theologians. Referring to Hispanics drawn to Protestantism in North and South America Susan Ross describes a similar phenomenon. She explains how “many continue to revere Mary, even in their new Protestant homes” (Irrazabal, Ross and Wacker 2008:28). In her analysis she tells us that “Mary has for so long held such a significant role that it is not possible to simply ‘dislodge’ her from her elevated status...” (Irrazabal, Ross and Wacker 2008:32). Accepting this, we can understand that in the liturgical lives of these women one cannot expect that Mary would suddenly disappear upon embracing the Protestant tradition. Yet, psychological explanations cannot account for the whole situation⁴⁵⁴. It is true that Mary is not ‘dislodged’ or ‘shrunk’ to a Protestant size, yet she is not unaffected. She is, as we will show, held in tension. And it is this tension that works theologically for these women.

The Paradox:

Going through the interviews and the participant observation we see a ‘Marian paradox’, as de Haardt (2011) calls it. However, unlike de Haardt’s concern, the tension here does not reflect on gender but on the divine. The women seem to maintain two positions simultaneously: the first is that Mary is just a human being and the second is that she is not just a human being. Referring to Nada’s quote earlier we see this clearly illustrated in one and the same testimony “Because she is not a human being like me” Nada says and then two lines later: “(...) she was a human being”. Though here the paradox appears clearly in words, for many women it is woven in their lives and experiences.

Reflecting on their faith, the women do not only speak of what the virgin is and can do but also what she is not and cannot do. It seems to be important for them to qualify her presence. As they do so, they underline four major areas where they agree with the Protestant Church’s image of Mary. First, they affirm feverishly that “she alone cannot do

⁴⁵⁴ Even Jung himself would leave space for this as he says: “Because a so-called metaphysical statement is looked upon as a psychic process it is by no means said that it is ‘only psychological’”, Jung, Carl G. “The Mass and the Individuation Process”, quoted in Mitchell, Nathan D. (1999). *Liturgy and the Social Sciences*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, p.12.

anything”⁴⁵⁵; second that “she is not redemptive”⁴⁵⁶, third that she is human, and fourth that one should not pray to her. Accordingly few women decided to give up Marian fasts and feasts, others do not put certain pictures (or obvious pictures) of Mary in their homes, and some even say they have “overcome (my) devotion to Mary”⁴⁵⁷ as Rania puts it.

Aspects that have been established as essential for the average Catholic spirituality such as Mary’s virginity, her freedom from sin, and her role in salvation history (Irrazabal, Ross and Wacker 2008:7) do not play a large role for the women in question. All these statements are substantiated by the women’s behavior in and towards Mary and Marian feasts, for example, where their participation is ambiguous. Though present and sometimes even organizing, they are also critical and take distance from certain practices, objects and expressions of piety. Having accompanied Lara to the celebration of the feast of the Assumption of Mary, she clearly showed her selective participation in the feast. She chose not to walk in the procession behind the adorned Marian image, she criticized those who touched the statues and pictures and kissed them, and expressed her skepticism about popular miracles of weeping statues. Yet, Lara piously sat on the benches inside the church and participated in other liturgical aspects of the feast.

Howbeit, as we have showed above their Mary is still not ‘Protestant’. She is clearly an active Mary, who has powers to heal and protect, who is present everywhere, and with whom one communicates – even if some women chose not to call this communication ‘prayer’. By explicitly rejecting some of her classical attributes (or images) and criticizing popular devotion around her, the women intentionally distance themselves from the known Catholic and Orthodox Marian piety, almost resisting this popular hegemony⁴⁵⁸. Yet, at the same time they do not ‘give up’ Mary or adopt her ‘Protestant’ size.

These aspects of Mary that emerge from their practices coincide with what Maaïke de Haardt distills as “elements for a Marian theology and spirituality” (de Haardt 2011:175). We mention in particular De Haardt’s emphasis on the experience of presence and on the possibility of ‘relationality’ and the desire for healing. These aspects, she explains, give glimpses of the “female divine dimensions”(de Haardt 2011:175). For de Haardt, the value

⁴⁵⁵ Youmna, interview, December 2009.

⁴⁵⁶ Nada, interview, December 2009.

⁴⁵⁷ Rania, biography, 2010.

⁴⁵⁸ Which might carry both theological and political tones.

of this exercise is to show that a woman can represent the divine. However, as we look at these practices we are interested to see how these dimensions relate to other dimensions of God in the women's lives.

Coloring God

Far from the discussion on whether Mary plays a role alongside Jesus in redemption, as co-redemptrix, or is between God and humans in communication⁴⁵⁹, these women's Mary is a Mary who is alongside them. She is "next to me", "with me all the time", they say. And yet she is not one of them. She is still more and communicates something of the divine to them.

Many contemporary theologians, feminist and liberation, men and women, western and non-western, advocate the feminine face of God. For some, God in general takes feminine features; "She Who Is" says Johnson in her book on God in feminist theological discourse (Johnson 1992). For others, particularly non-western theologians, it is Jesus who holds feminine characteristics or a motherly function (Frederiks and Brinkman 2009:185–204). And for many the Holy Spirit is identified with Sophia. However, these theological propositions do not take shape in official liturgical practices and are rather alienating to ecclesial authorities. Susan Ross underlines that in the absence of the theological acceptance of this feminine face of God or inclusive language about God, Mary fills a gap (Ross 2008:31) in people's experience of the divine. Parallel to this, many theologians see in the image of Mary the embodiment of these feminine aspects of God, Christ or Holy Spirit. Schillebeeckx (Schillebeeckx and Halkes 1993) speaks of Mary as the female face of God. Martien Brinkman explains how Latin America Mariology "ushers breakthrough in new Christological reflections" (Brinkman 2009:286) and Orlando Espin (Johnson 2008:13) explains that Mary functions as a popular pneumatology.

It is our conviction that in our case the women's images of Mary color their image of God and do not compete with it as an independent deity or as interchangeable with one of the persons of the Trinity. By holding on to the connection between mother and son⁴⁶⁰, by underlining that 'she alone cannot do anything' and that she is only human, they establish their 'orthodox' Christian view of God. However, from her other more cosmic attributes

⁴⁵⁹ A problematic and unacceptable position for the Heidelberg Catechism for example.

⁴⁶⁰ We remind how Antoinette spoke of the image of Mary creating in her how much she loves Jesus for example.

they complement their image of God. Femininity and with it the possibility for relationship⁴⁶¹, undeserved suffering, as well as motherhood are not of the attributes of God that are presented in the churches around them. While the Protestant church, for example, sings “what a friend we have in Jesus” and addresses God as “Our heavenly father”, where friendship and parenthood are upheld, it is in the company of men that one sits. This of course is by far not an exclusively Protestant feature but rather a general Christian feature (Berger 2011:173). “I grew up with the image that God is a man (...) the church is a man’s circle”⁴⁶² says Stephanie in her biography. Yet, this all male atmosphere of the divine seems more pressing in the Protestant context where despite a theology that has ample space for these aspects, liturgically it is estranged from any feminine imageries. A situation compensated in Maronite or Orthodox Churches by the multiplicity of female saints and metaphors⁴⁶³.

In the patriarchal Arab society, maleness and fatherhood take on features that are not very approachable for the women (Lattouf 2004; Roded 2008; Heyberger 2003:187–239). The man Jesus is difficult to befriend (even if easily worshiped and honored), and one cannot identify with him or with his suffering. Even more, from the perspective of these women the church seems to underline that the father “sent his only son to die” intentionally. As for Jesus, he could have avoided suffering yet opted to obey. This kind of suffering is far from their daily experience. Their kind of suffering is not a choice nor a decision but a fact imposed on them due to their relationships. Moreover, for many women Jesus’s suffering is of a different category not only because it was a choice but also because Jesus is God. His suffering is different from the suffering of Mary, the woman, to whom this happened despite her.

In this respect the presence of Mary in the piety of these women seems to qualify God and their divine world and to add dimensions otherwise missing. Whether this is a human need and longing for the motherly, female aspect projected on the divine, or whether these are aspects of God experienced by the women and then projected on Mary is another question. However, the tension the women maintain between love/dedication on the one hand and

⁴⁶¹ Echoing Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, p.6.

⁴⁶² Stephanie, *Spiritual biography*, 2010.

⁴⁶³ However, paradoxically Protestant Churches have liturgically less feminine divine imageries but more space for women in public ecclesial ministry; Orthodox and Maronite Churches have more feminine divine imageries and much less space for women in ecclesial ministry.

distance/caution on the other, keeps her position rather ambiguous. The women do not seem to mind what those around them think of this. They continue to fashion their own Mary and they do not hesitate bringing her with them into the Protestant Church. "I don't care that Mary is not mentioned in the Protestant Church, of course I talk to her, even in the Protestant Church" explained Youmna. Lara also shared this position "yes, when I pray I address myself to her during the Protestant service. Is she not present there as well?!".

The divine without the image of Mary seems to be insufficient. For them, the divine comes in a package, with a loving, crying and accessible mother-like presence. And yet though they affirm that they do not miss her in the Protestant Church (because she is everywhere), they do accuse the Protestant Church of being afraid of Mary.

Are we afraid of Mary?

"Why are you afraid as Protestants to speak about the virgin?" asked Nana. "Now, if what's his name Luther, for example wants to split from the Catholics he bound them with these very tight things...but now in the 21st century we are aware and knowledgeable. We are not like children afraid that we lapse back into worshipping the virgin". Perhaps Nana is right. Mary is scary for Protestants, as Fuad's testimony indicated in the beginning of this article. She is scary for Protestants when she reminds them of pre-Christian goddesses⁴⁶⁴ or when she brings memories of 'superstitious' piety. However, by adopting both types of Marys, the human-biblical and the cosmic, these women create a new situation. In its paradoxical and ambiguous state, this image of Mary- which seems to be slightly more fluid than we had assumed- could be accommodated in a Protestant liturgy after all.

⁴⁶⁴ In a land holding on to its archeological history, this association is kept alive naturally because of visual similarities between Isis and the *Theotokos* or parallels in titles such "Queen of Heaven", see de Haardt, 'The Marian Paradox', p.169. Moreover, Arab theologians such as Metr. George Khodr are reconciled with this continuation as he refers to the mythological roots of the cult of the virgin Mary as "a sort of evangelical preparation among the gentiles", in 'The Mother of God', *The Ecumenical Review*, p.30.

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Chapter 8: General Discussion and Conclusions

The church bells began ringing, the service came to an end and the faithful streamed out of the beautiful Protestant Church in Beirut. Mona came to collect her grandson from Sunday School. She opened her purse and took out a napkin, unwrapped the piece of bread and was about to offer it to the little boy. ‘Oh, was there communion today?’, I asked. I had missed the service by staying in the Sunday school rooms. ‘No.’, said Mona hesitantly, ‘Ah, this? This... it’s ...it’s not from here’. And before I knew it, Mona was almost apologizing for having a piece of Qourban (antidoron- bread) brought two days before from the Orthodox Church. Though she was acquainted with my research and had been part of it for some time, she felt compelled to rationalize her act as she stood there with bread and napkin in her hand undecided whether she should warp it and put it away or continue with her intended act; an act that flowed naturally with her. My curious question disturbed the continuity that she experiences between the Sunday morning worship in the Protestant church, her occasional visits to the Orthodox Church, and her relationship with her children and grandchildren. This episode⁴⁶⁵ illustrates much of the discussion in this research and reminds of all the themes that surfaced: The fluidity between the traditions, the mixing of one element into the context of another, material objects and their disappearance and re-appearance, a theology performed in actions, connectedness, etc. and the constant nudge the Protestant presence exercises on these liturgical lives; exercised here through my question. In this final chapter, I remind of the context of this study, revisit the research questions and highlight the implications it presents.

I. LOOKING BACK

This bouquet of articles is built on data harvested from my interaction with the liturgical lives of 27 women. The purpose of this study was to understand what happens in the liturgical lives of these people when more than one liturgical tradition merge together, to shed light on the unknown aspect of their practices of faith and to discover the theology(ies) these practices embody. The analysis of the empirical data has shown that the movement

⁴⁶⁵ February 2014.

between two radically different liturgical discourses sets the liturgical lives of these women in motion, liquefies essential entities, and brings theological dynamics to the fore.

At the start of this research my aim was to rethink the Lebanese Protestant liturgy and worship in light of the situation and needs of some of its members. During the research, I came to the conviction that contrary to my initial inkling, changing official liturgies is not what is needed or even desired. On the contrary, the women considered want the official liturgical practices to remain the same. “The beauty is in the difference” told more than one woman. The women want the freedom to choose and fashion their own practices within established traditions. Yet, studying their lives and practices help position them within the Protestant tradition, and is relevant for the particular communities as well as for the study of faith practices in general.

II. THEOLOGY, LITURGY AND METAPHORS

Practical theologian Mary McClintock Fulkerson connects theology, lived faith and ‘knowledge of God’,⁴⁶⁶ in the term *theologia*. As she attempts to define systematic theology, she underlines that Jesus himself was not such a theologian who is preoccupied with ‘organizing of cognitive claims into coherent systems’.⁴⁶⁷ On the contrary, the gospels propose narratives, parables, metaphors, rituals that sometimes even seem contradictory. In the same way, situations of faith present us with stories and images that are not always systematic and neatly structured. On the contrary they are messy and chaotic yet testify to genuine faith, struggles and relationships with others and with God.

The lives I have interacted with presented me with images and bits of theology that do not systematically fit together. Contrarily, the theological flows in the lives of these women are sometimes contradictory and clash together. As I consider the entirety of these confluences, I propose ways of looking at these women in their own specificity. What I have done in the various articles is articulate how these flows interact and express theological notions. In order to do so I had recourse to multiple metaphors, a style not alien to the academic

⁴⁶⁶ Mary McClintock Fulkerson, ‘Systematic Theology’ in Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2012), p.357.

⁴⁶⁷ Fulkerson, ‘Systematic Theology’, p.358.

theological discourse.⁴⁶⁸ Inspired by Derrida (1976), I underline that words cannot capture and fix meaning, but that meaning is always deferred, *différance*. What I advance is a variety of ways and angles to look at these lives rather than a final definition and conclusion. I gave thus many interpretations of the same lives sited with various lenses aiming at refracting rather than fixating, as in a kaleidoscope. The metaphors proposed in every article help to construct meaning out of the situation encountered and experienced, put together they propose an overall pattern.

By doing this I heed Ronald Grimes' words: "Get imaginative, be playful". By admitting that there is a certain foolishness or playfulness, a kind of musicality or poetry, to theorizing, we are not defiling these fine and high arts, only admitting that theorizing too is an imaginative practice'.⁴⁶⁹

The metaphors proposed are in the fields of moving, flowing, gliding, shifting and recentering, crafting, art, playing and coloring. In all these metaphors there are elements related to 'energy' and/or 'creativity', reflecting a dynamic interaction between the women's expressions and appropriations and God's presence and action. They convey that these liturgical lives are neither static nor sterile. On the contrary they are in continuous motion and creativity.

III. ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS

How these women live their liturgical lives and what theology(ies) are enacted through their practices turned out to be the same question. The *what* of theology and the *how* of the practices are intrinsically connected. It is therefore but one question that I have asked and by interpreting the practices and the *hows*, I presented their theology. In what follows I will sketch some general aspects of this theology(ies).

One of the highlights of these liturgical lives is movement; unstructured continuous movement between physical churches, liturgical traditions, places of worship and

⁴⁶⁸ Marcel Barnard, Johan Cilliers, Cas Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture. Fields and Methods, Concepts and Metaphors*, (Liturgia Condenda 28), (Leuven etc.: Peeters, 2014), p.9.

⁴⁶⁹ Ronald Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 8.

pilgrimage sites. I have described the ‘confluences of organic-cultural flows’⁴⁷⁰ where past and present, traditions and world views, private and public, material and spiritual, western and eastern flow into each other. Though some would call this hybridity (see discussion below), I looked at what these movements achieve and reveal liturgically and theologically. I have shown in the article *Kinetics of Healing* how movement helps in crossing from one situation to another: from a situation of suffering or inadequacy to a situation of healing. Yet this movement also revealed a state of restlessness, where the women realize that complete ‘crossing’ to a final state of healing and joy, to a ‘home’, is not (yet) possible. The movements that they engage in are, in a sense, eschatological as they seek and point to a ‘better’ future situation. Their complex liturgical make up sharpens their realization of the inadequacy of the liturgical forms available and drives them to move around, try different places, practices and times as well as shuffle concepts in expectation.

Another theological notion that comes to the fore in those investigated lives is the ‘immediate’ experience of the divine in the everyday life where a situation of proximity and intimacy with God is obvious. Not only do the women experience presence in the material objects, pictures and food, but also in their daily rituals and practices where intimate, basic knowledge happens. In this organic and natural reliance on God, comes a search for and experience of blessing, healing, sustenance, protection and accompaniment yet only rarely punctuated with the notions of salvation and transformation. Many – particularly feminist⁴⁷¹ – theologians highlight this situation as particular to women’s experience of God, a rather immanent God. However, in the lives I looked at, there is always another discourse nudging them. The presence of the Protestant tradition in their lives presses the concepts of salvation and transformation, which in turn perturb the daily practices where fleeting moments of alienation happen.

This experience of God in the here and now, in the material world and the events of life, reveals a certain ontology and a way of relating to God where continuity rather than

⁴⁷⁰ From Thomas Tweed’s definition, Tweed Thomas, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008), p.54.

⁴⁷¹ Lynda Sexson, *Ordinarily Sacred* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1992); Angela Berlis and Anne-Marie Korte, *Alledaags en Buitengewoon: Spiritualiteit in Vrouwendomeinen* (Vucht: Skandalon, 2012); Bonnie Miller-McLemore, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology* (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2012).

discontinuity is perceived between this world and the 'other'; a continuity between the living and the dead, and between the body and the spirit. It is a world view where God is everywhere and in everything all the time. Yet again moments of hesitation occur when this world view is challenged and discontinuity is suggested in the Protestant discourse. In this hesitation – or in Bruno Latour's words, 'cracks'⁴⁷² – the women are addressed as their deep-seated theological images are shaken. Their image of God – an image that proved to be quite complex and in which the saints, the dead, and Mary take part – is thus creatively and continuously revised preventing it from 'freezing' or fossilizing.

Not only are the women connected to God and the divine world but they are also simply connected. Their spirituality – despite all the western/modern flows in it – is a spirituality of connectedness and continuity with the living and the dead, with God and the creation, with church and culture, with the many traditions, the different times and places. This connectedness might be seen as a barrier between them and the call for the 'inner' and individual experience of the divine or otherwise said the personal salvation experience (or conversion) that is sometimes called for by the Jesuit as well as the pietistic/Evangelical traditions. Though this personalized faith of the women is more elaborately expressed in the private sphere and alone, it is far from individualism. Prayer life for these women is never detached or disconnected. On the contrary it is always about their entire web of connections and within it rather than for the salvation of their own soul. The Protestant discourse that tries to engage the individual in them, teases them to 'step out' of their web in order to become actors *for* rather than actors *on behalf of* their web. An ethical imperative strikes them, as they are faced with this situation where instead of bringing or embracing their own web in prayer, cooking, fasting, pilgrimages, and rituals, they feel compelled to turn towards their web as 'detached' individuals and take responsibility. To illustrate this I give the example of prayer *on behalf of* one's children. Many women feel that as they step forward in prayer their children automatically are also brought forth as they are 'organically' connected. The Protestant discourse in their situation forces them to

⁴⁷² Bruno Latour, 'What is Iconoclasm? Or is There a World Beyond the Image Wars?' in Bruno Latour and Peter Wiebel (eds.) *Iconoclasm Beyond the Image Wars in Science Religion and Art*, (ZKM centre for Art and Media Karlsruhe) (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: The MIT Press) and Bruno Latour, 'How to be Iconophilic in Art, Science and Religion' in Carrie Jones and Peter Galison, (eds.) *Picturing Science Producing Art* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 418–440.

disentangle from their children and face their children as individuals with their own personal faith and responsibility and find ways to act *for* them or towards them, for example by teaching, admonishing and encouraging in faith.

IV. HYBRID, IN-BETWEEN OR *BRICOLAGE*

A look at the lives and theologies of these women invites the reader, particularly the theologian, to classify them as confused, or misinformed. Their liturgical lives are *bricolages* where elements and ideas already present in their environment are manipulated, mixed, and connected creatively. Though they do not create a new and separate tradition, they do stand somewhere in-between all the traditions yet connected to them all.

The liturgical situation of these women reminds many of migrant Christians and churches where the believer is caught up in-between two worlds. In those situations, the person's identity is threatened and he or she lives in ambivalence and ambiguity.⁴⁷³ Many theologians and anthropologists have examined the faith and worship of migrant communities.⁴⁷⁴

Korean theologian Sang Hyun Lee for example, considers the in-between-ness of Korean American Protestants and pleads for a liturgical situation that acknowledges and embraces their liminality. Inspired by Victor Turner, he sees in liminality a possibility for creativity, community (*communitas*) and prophetic critique of existing structures. This return to the idea of liminality in connection to worship is upheld by more theologians today. Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener, for example, underline this element in their latest book and connect liminality not only to worship in general and in our network society in particular, but to the

⁴⁷³ C. Caldas-Coulthard, and A. M. Fernandes Alves, 'Mongrel Selves: Identity Change, Displacement and Multi-positioning' in Caldas-Coulthard and Iedema R. (eds.), *Identity Trouble: Critical Discourse and Contested Identities*, (England: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008) pp.120-142.

⁴⁷⁴ Cf. D. Koning, *Importing God: The Mission of the Ghanaian Adventist Church and Other Migrant Churches in the Netherlands*, (Amsterdam: VU dissertation, 2011); M. Jansen and H. C. Stoffels, *A Moving God. Immigrant Churches in the Netherlands*, (Zurich/Berlin: Lit Verlag 2008); M. Jansen, "God on the Border: Missiology as Critical Theological Guidance for Crossing Borders" in V. Küster (ed), *Mission Revisited: Between Mission History and Intercultural Theology*, (Zürich/Berlin: LitVerlag 2010), 45-62; M. Klomp, *The Sound of Worship. Liturgical performance by Surinamese Lutherans and Ghanaian Methodists in Amsterdam* (= Liturgia Condenda 26), (Leuven/Paris/Walpole: Peeters, 2011); P. E. Klassen, *Going by the Moon and the Stars. Stories of Two Russian Mennonite Women*, (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1994) to name just a few.

Trinitarian God himself, who is ‘connected and rooted’ as well as ‘ascending and descending’.⁴⁷⁵

Yet, in the discussion around migrant Christians this liminality and in-between-ness is mostly a socio-cultural situation rather than a theological one. In the case of the women considered here, their in-between-ness is not socio-cultural where one’s ethnicity or civic status is being challenged. They are in between liturgical traditions, a situation that carries many theological layers.

Yet again, this theological in-between-ness is not of the caliber of that studied by theologians such as Robert Schreiter⁴⁷⁶ where he considers religious differences alongside cultural hybridity. In Schreiter’s approach this situation of in-between two religions can engender syncretism, which for him is divided between good syncretism and bad syncretism. Still, in this typology there is difference in culture alongside religion and there is always one main side that borrows and incorporates elements from the other.

The women considered in this research do not exactly fit in these kinds of migrant hybridity. They are in-between Christian liturgical traditions within their overall Lebanese and Christian culture where neither the theological difference nor the cultural difference is as dramatic as, say, Korean-American or Christian-Hindu. Yet, they do share some general characteristics with migrants and can ‘somehow’ be considered liturgically liminal. Just like liminals in general these women display creativity, freedom from structure and playful attitudes.⁴⁷⁷ They also in certain contexts play a prophetic role and point at possibilities and alternatives.⁴⁷⁸ Yet, unlike classical liminals, in no way do these women form a physical group, a community or in Turner’s terminology a *communitas*, except on the pages of this research. In reality, they remain individuals and should, in my opinion, remain individuals that do not long for their own custom made liminal worship – as the one Lee pleads for, for the Korean Americans.

⁴⁷⁵ Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener, *Flows Worship in the Network Culture*, Chapters 4 and 5.

⁴⁷⁶ R. J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* (Michigan: Orbis Books, 1997); R. J. Schreiter, and the Localism, Hybrid Identities, and Religion. Schreiter, and the Local4.

⁴⁷⁷ See in this thesis chapter 4 and 5.

⁴⁷⁸ See in this thesis chapter 2.

There is an in-between-ness and a hybridity to their lives yet not in a sense where a new ‘stable’ hybrid or compound is being created but where existing stable notions are made unstable and continuously challenged. In the words of Thomas Tweed: If there is a *crossing* here, there is no *dwelling* and if I listen to the women, no wish for dwelling in a new structure or form.

Yet, saying that I do not plea (and the women do not hope) for a new ‘liminal’ or ‘in-between’ liturgical reality that will match their situation and maybe force them into a community, does not mean that we should ignore their reality. On the contrary, the aim of this research is to highlight their dynamic liturgical reality without aiming at fixating it since, as this research shows, the promise of these liturgical lives is in their fluidity and their ‘cracks’.⁴⁷⁹

Their active presence in their communities can help the communities to remain reflective and self-critical and benefit from creativity in the areas of the arts, music, performance, imageries and metaphors. I speak here of the Protestant congregations where these women worship and where as I have outlined so far, there is ample space for learning and being challenged by these liturgical lives. This, of course, is a fact that is happening to a certain degree spontaneously when Protestant churches rework their feasting practices, funeral rites, marriage ceremonies, baptism services, and some of their liturgical vessels. Many elements from the in-between people’s liturgical practices find their way into the services and churches. My plea for the Protestant Church is to neither feel threatened in its purity by this situation, nor to blindly embrace everything that comes its way in its attempts to be relevant and to respond to popular requests. However, it should openly look at the creativity and listen to the critical voices in it, and these women are some of those who could nudge it. Therefore, I would not classify the theology of these women as *Contextual Reformed Theology*, but as one of the critical voices within it that reminds it of blind spots and help keep its theology in motion.

⁴⁷⁹ Latour, ‘How to be Iconophilic in Art, Science and Religion’, pp. 418–440.

V. IS THIS TOO PARTICULAR?

This research looked at a particular and rather obscure marginal case in a miniscule Church (less than 1% of the population) in a minute country. One can only wonder what the relevance of looking at this speck is. Yet though it is a speck, looking at the theologies of these women connects with more general questions concerning the study of lived faith, women's practices as well as eastern Christianity.

Studying these women illustrates aspects of the context of lived faith, lived liturgy or theology in *actu*. In their lives we see the embodiment of the flows that run in our global societies and contemporary state of worship and liturgy. In their *bricolage* they mirror the spirituality of late modernity.⁴⁸⁰ In their fluidity and creativity they echo with many mixed groups in the world, whether migrants or converts. We also see the appropriation of faith which though very particular 'exceeds its own boundaries'.⁴⁸¹ Studies on lived, ordinary or everyday theology do not see in this kind of particularity a limitation but opportunities.⁴⁸² Even from a Reformed perspective Brinkman explains that despite historical 'shameful marks of division of faith', 'Reformed Churches always articulated and still articulate their faith according to the adage "in loco et in tempore"'⁴⁸³ while exceeding their limits to uphold catholicity.

In the same way these women are a particular case, in a small place in this bracket of time in history, yet in their particularity they point at issues relevant for churches and traditions in other times, places and situations. In a sense these women are 'attached and detached' in the words of Brinkman, or 'rooted and connected' in the words of Barnard. Attached to places and traditions in which they are rooted yet detached from them via their movement to connect to other wider issues and possibilities.

⁴⁸⁰ Barnard, Cilliers, Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, chapter 6.

⁴⁸¹ Quoting Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, Brinkman speaks of "Authentic universalism can only mean a particularism exceeding its own boundaries"⁴⁸¹, M. E. Brinkman, 'Contextual Theology, Tradition and Heresy', in M.E Brinkman and D. van Keulen, *Christian identity in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2003), p.123.

⁴⁸² Cf. M. Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴⁸³ Brinkman, 'Contextual Theology', p.126.

A further question that could be posed here concerns the connection between these women and the practices of women in other places and times. This research was about particular women, they are Eastern, Lebanese and Christian. In addition, they are in a particular situation (Protestant–Orthodox or Protestant–Maronite marriages). Though the research at its outset did not approach them in a gendered way, much of the discussion hooked on research concerning women. Looking at their lives, I recognized historical trends raised by Susan J. White, *A History of Women in Christian Worship*, or general female practices such as Kay Turner’s discussion of home altars, or the Dutch as well as the American academic connection between women’s theology and the everyday.⁴⁸⁴ Not only are the forms parallel between the women I have considered and other women practices, but also the emphasis in theological themes. Common lines I have seen are the general tendency to connect women’s spirituality with an experience of sustenance rather than salvation and to look in the everyday and the domestic for a theology of immanence rather than of transcendence. Nonetheless, this cannot be conclusive or exclusive. These are only some lines of similarity between researches in a field and with methods that are just emerging. The fact that I am a woman might also be a reason for me to see and focus on aspects a male researcher would have overlooked.

Besides their being women, these individuals are Eastern Christian. A question of course that presents itself here is whether what I have seen in these lives is particularly Eastern. If much of the results share in the claims of contemporary liturgical–ritual and everyday faith as well as research on women’s spirituality, is it still particularly Eastern? Do others in the Middle East share in aspects of this religiosity, or kind of theology? Would Middle Eastern men display similar theological aspects? Or is this an illustration of one instance that could have no geographical relevance? To answer these questions more research should be done on the practices of faith of other categories of Christians in the Middle East such as men, young people, the Lebanese communities in diaspora etc.

In this research I have looked at a certain liturgical tension and the unique way in which these women deal with it, i.e. by shifting and recentering, by varying practices, and by flowing and moving. Other tensions and situations of liturgical ambiguity could trigger

⁴⁸⁴ Such Angela Berlis, Anne–Marie Korte, Maaike de Haardt, Barabara McClure, Bonnie Miller–McLemore, Lynda Sexson among others.

different appropriations and reactions that might be worth studying. In addition, in this research I have taken into consideration the presence of the three strands: Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Protestantism in the lives of these women. Nevertheless, I admit that this is not enough to account for the entire image we have. These women, just as many others, are also influenced paradoxically by both western ‘secularization’ and by Islam, as well as other available religions and ideologies. My probing angle was very specific and relatively narrow.

VI. IMPLICATIONS AND CHALLENGES

I have summed up so far how I have done this research, what confluences and theological flows I have seen and I have argued that though these women do not express a contextual Lebanese Reformed theology per se, they can play a liminal-critical role in their own contexts as they ‘exceed their boundaries’. I shall now turn to the particular context of the Protestant churches in Lebanon to highlight in what concrete ways the presence and practices of these women challenge them.

I am not the only Lebanese Protestant who grew up with ‘bed time stories’ about the Anglo-American missionaries of the nineteenth century, their worldview and their contribution to Lebanese society and culture. This era of our history has been emphasized to the point of creating the feeling of organic connections with names such as Daniel Bliss, Cornelius van Dyke or Henry Jessup⁴⁸⁵ who became like ‘grandfathers’ to an otherwise orphan Protestant community. It is no exaggeration if I say that the Lebanese Protestant community derives its identity largely from the memory and work of those people. Even to this day, the only interesting era to rescue and preserve for the Lebanese Protestant community is that of the ‘golden age’ of 19th century missionary days.

Not only are the Lebanese focused on that era but so are scholars from all over the world. For the past 15 to 20 years, research on 19th century missionary work in the Middle East is

⁴⁸⁵ All three major American Missionaries. Daniel Bliss is founder of what is today the American University of Beirut; Cornelius van Dyke is the major force behind the current Arabic Bible used in Protestant Churches and Henry Jessup marked his stamp on Protestant schools and spirituality during more than fifty years in the region.

still in full swing.⁴⁸⁶ Only recently, was I approach by an American lady working on a PhD about 19th century Bible Women in Lebanon; this well does not seem to dry nor lose its charm. Though I can understand the pull of the 19th century, and though I am enticed by this domain, I propose in this research that it is time for the Protestant churches in Lebanon to move from a focus on time and critically appropriate the ‘spatial turn’.⁴⁸⁷ Not that the 19th century should be ignored, far from it, but that history should not be seen as the *only* interesting lens. This study aims at opening the eyes of both Lebanese Protestants and international researchers to the riches and complexities of this community as it lives and how it moves *today*.

The focus on the formative years of the Lebanese Protestant Churches risks blinding it (and others) to the complex and variegated reality; a reality far from the form of modernity that grips it essentially in its discourse.⁴⁸⁸ I have shown so far that not only is the constituency of the Protestant churches mixed and varied but so is its own instinctive liturgical response to it. One can see this in the spontaneous adaptations made in baptisms, weddings and funerals, i.e. by sometimes accepting double baptisms, by including processions in ceremonies, by allowing the Ave Maria to be sung, or bread to be distributed at funerals etc. Church leaders and theologians who are weighed down by the modernist ‘purity’ discourse and who use 19th century missionary discourse as normative are troubled by the discrepancy between ‘theory’ and the demands of the practical life of the congregations. In Mary Fulkerson’s words, it is “the inadequate (modernist) model for Christian community as a coherent system of belief”⁴⁸⁹ that is challenged by the lives and practices of these women (and others).

Yet even for the American missionaries themselves and their discourse there is a challenge in this research. Historian Ussama Makdisi, labeled the efforts of the 19th century American

⁴⁸⁶ See more in H. Murre-van den Berg, ‘The Study of Western Missions in the Middle East (1820–1920): An Annotated Bibliography’ in N. Friedrich, U. Kaminsky, R. Löffler, *The Social Dimension of Christian Missions in the Middle East: Historical Studies of the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2010), 35–53.

⁴⁸⁷ Tweed expands on this imperative by weaving insights from Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, Frederic Jameson, Anthony Giddens and David Harvey, in Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, p. 9.

⁴⁸⁸ U. Makdesi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2008), p.215.

⁴⁸⁹ Flukerson, *Places of Redemption*, p. 22.

missionaries as ‘a failed conversion of the Middle East’⁴⁹⁰ and proclaimed the futility of evangelism in a multi-religious land. Within the framework of the missionaries who aimed at reviving the ‘nominal’ churches of the East⁴⁹¹, Makdisi declared a failure. Yet, in my opinion, this ‘failure’ is only a ‘failure’ if the modernist discourse is upheld and where conversion is in terms of monolithic categories. Another way of looking at this phenomenon is to accept with Brinkman that ‘Christianity does not exist of converts who leave their communities, but of converts who experience the renewal of their lives within their own communities’.⁴⁹² Though these women are not converts, they do come from the very churches the missionaries labeled ‘nominal’ and aimed at reviving. And though they do not leave their traditions of origin, it is by ‘de-freeze-framing’. Or shifting and recentering both traditions (the old and the new) that they experience ‘the renewal of their lives’, or are addressed. Breaking the dichotomy of us and them, East and West, right and wrong, it is by deconstructing, by keeping the flow, that these women challenge even the Protestant community when it experiences rigidity.

VII. ACROSS AND AHEAD

In these articles there are lines of continuity but also discontinuity and paradoxes. The end picture is not a smooth and clear image but fragments. The way these articles are written and presented also reflects a process and my understanding of theology, echoing Mary Fulkerson’s description: ‘Theological reflection is not a linear form of reflection that starts with a correct doctrine (or a ‘worldly’ insight) and then proceeds to analyze a situation; rather it is a situational, ongoing, never-finished dialectical process where past and present ever converge in new ways’⁴⁹³ and, I add, point to an eschatological future.

‘No theological statement fully conveys divine being and action. Our understandings of revelation are never final or complete’.⁴⁹⁴ We see darkly in a mirror and we need each other to collect all these ‘illuminating fragments’. This research consciously avoided using

⁴⁹⁰ Makdesi, *Artillery of Heaven*.

⁴⁹¹ Cf. H. Murre-van den Berg (ed.), *New Faiths in Ancient Lands: Western Missions in the Middle East in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

⁴⁹² Brinkman and van Keulen (eds.), *Christian identity in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, p.13.

⁴⁹³ Ch. Scharen and A. M. Vigen (eds.), *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), p.74.

⁴⁹⁴ Scharen and Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology*, p.69.

explicitly traditional theological terminology in order to allow for these lives to speak and not only be spoken to. Truth is multifaceted and ambiguous and I meant to highlight that and to propose a story or an image no matter how fluid and blurred that image is.

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Summary

This study aims at understanding how Lebanese women who come from Antiochian Orthodox and Maronite Churches and who by marriage join the Lebanese Protestant Churches, live their liturgical lives. It focuses on the practices of faith of these women in their everyday life. Using ethnographic methods such as participant observation, interviews, and autobiographies, I consider the practices of 27 women. I use cultural-anthropological methods and concepts as well as theological notions to answer the main question of this research: How do these women live their liturgical lives and what theology(ies) do their practices enact?

By looking at the practices of faith of ordinary (non-theologians) people in their everyday life, I take particular and embodied faith practices seriously. I consider everything that the women mention and do to connect or communicate with the divine in their homes, churches, work or travels. I see theology at work in those practices, where non-conceptual as well as conceptual knowledge is displayed. I approach these theologies and practices from various angles using concepts and theories from a variety of disciplines. The analysis is then offered in separate articles published in disciplinary journals that illuminate the topic.

The empirical data showed that the lives of these women are characterized by motion and by fluidity. These two concepts are treated differently in the various articles. To start, I describe how the women move between the many liturgical traditions available for them and mix the theological notions and practices as they go, in a *bricolage*. These women, who do not form a physical group but are rather individuals on the move, appropriate the various liturgical styles each in her own personalized way. Proving that the borders between ecclesial structures are porous and flexible, the practices of these women challenge the illusion of liturgical purity. This is described in details in the first article: "Taking Liberties: The fluid Liturgical Lives of Orthodox and Maronite Women within the Protestant Church in Lebanon". In a second article "Itinerant Feasting: Eastern Christian Women Negotiating (Physical) Presence in the Celebration of Easter", I describe the women's particular feasting manner. I focus on the celebration of Easter and on the way the women move between their mother church and the Protestant church where a process of negotiation is taking place. Starting with the bodily experience of the feast, I analyze how

each liturgical context physically orients and temporally locates the women. I explain how the engagement of the body relates to the material experience of presence. Constantly moving between the different celebrations the women considered create a personal symbolic network where their perception of Christ's presence and absence is challenged. In this weaving of the feasting experiences the women perform their liturgical and sacramental theology.

Focusing on the homes, I distinguish between two main angles. The first highlights the importance of material – particularly visual– objects. The second looks at actions and home rituals. These two angles consider the same context yet use different theories and metaphors to understand it. The article 'Rearranging Things: How Protestant attitudes shake the Objects in the Piety of Eastern Christian Women' looks at how the objects in the piety of these women are challenged by the presence of the Protestant tradition in their lives. Objects that are normally inconspicuous – even 'invisible' – in their faith collide with Protestant attitudes and are shaken by dissonant theological concepts. Yet, these objects, icons, pictures, rocks, candles, oil, water etc. retain something of the holy in them and the women hesitate about their total elimination. In this murky situation, things are de-familiarized and yet re-emerge as active flexible agents with which individual theologies are written and connections are achieved. In the words of Bruno Latour, I explain how the things that furnish the lives of these women are 'de-freeze-framed' or shifted and recentered rather than destroyed or eliminated.

From another angle, still looking inside the homes, I consider the women's rituals and everyday practices in 'Kinesthetic Piety: Eastern Christian women's varying practices in Protestant homes'. I describe how they cense their homes, cook their food, and go about their daily occupations. I argue that these practices are ways of knowing God in the body through doing and making. In this particular example, due to the interaction of many theological flows, the women are impelled to revise, change and vary in their practices. This tinkering and 'playing' with the rituals is the arena where they form their theology and their religious knowledge– a knowledge that is mostly non-conceptual.

Not only is physical doing but also physical movement between geographical places meaningful. In the article 'Kinetics of Healing: Protestant Women Pledging Baptism in Saydnaya Orthodox Monastery' I take the example of a common practice among most of

these women to illustrate the function of physical motion. In the example of pledged baptisms in Saydanya Orthodox monastery, I show how motion relates to illness and the quest for healing. For the women in this particularly complex liturgical make up, a flexible and welcoming place that provides movement, meets their situation and facilitates their crossing from one situation to another. Yet this crossing is never definite, on the contrary they keep moving in hope and anticipation.

Finally, I tackle the topic of the Virgin Mary in the article: 'Which Mary? Eastern Christian women bringing their Mary into the Lebanese Protestant Church'. Mary is an important player in the piety and lives of the women considered. Moving between the Protestant tradition and their mother tradition sharpens the contrasts in their mind and alerts them to incongruity. Yet, as in all other aspects, the women take the liberty to choose among the many available images of Mary and fashion their own image and relationship with her. An analysis of the selected images shows that Mary helps give various 'missing' colors to the women's experience of God. In particular, her presence as accessible friend, mother and co-sufferer completes the image of the divine rather than competes with it.

These various articles propose a kaleidoscopic image of the liturgical lives of these women where movement, fluidity, variation and personal constructions are obvious. In their unsettled practices of faith one sees their activated search and their faith engagement. The – sometimes contradictory– flows are an incentive for involvement and creativity. This creativity is not always positively valued by the institutional traditions, yet it can still function as critical ally for continuous change.

Samenvatting

Dit onderzoek interpreteert het liturgische leven van Libanese vrouwen met een Antiocheens-orthodoxe of maronitische achtergrond die door hun huwelijk lid worden van een Libanese protestantse kerk. Het richt zich op de alledaagse geloofspraktijken van deze vrouwen. Met behulp van etnografische methoden als participerende observatie, interviews en autobiografieën bestudeer ik de geloofspraktijk van 27 vrouwen. Naast antropologische methoden en concepten gebruik ik theologische noties om de centrale vraag van dit onderzoek te beantwoorden: hoe geven deze vrouwen vorm aan hun liturgische leven en welke theologie(en) worden in hun geloofspraktijken belichaamd?

Door te kijken naar de geloofspraktijken van gewone mensen (niet-theologen) in het leven van alledag, neem ik het belichaamde en particuliere karakter van het geloof serieus. Ik neem alles in ogenschouw wat de vrouwen zeggen en doen, zowel in hun huizen, in hun kerken, op de werkvloer of op reis, om met het goddelijke in contact te komen en te communiceren. Ik zie theologie aan het werk in deze praktijken, waarin zich zowel niet-conceptuele als conceptuele kennis manifesteert. Ik benader deze theologieën en praktijken vanuit diverse invalshoeken en maak gebruik van concepten en theorieën uit diverse disciplines. De analyse waarmee ik licht werp op het onderwerp bied ik aan in verschillende artikelen in academische vakbladen.

De empirische gegevens tonen aan dat de levens van deze vrouwen gekenmerkt worden door beweging en viscositeit. Deze concepten behandel ik op verschillende manieren in mijn artikelen. Om te beginnen beschrijf ik hoe de vrouwen bewegen tussen de liturgische tradities die hen ter beschikking staan en hoe zij gaandeweg theologische noties en geloofspraktijken met elkaar vermengen tot een *bricolage*. Deze vrouwen, die geen fysieke groep vormen maar eerder individuen op hun eigen reis, eigenen zich diverse liturgische stijlen toe op hun eigen, persoonlijke wijze. Ze bewijzen dat de grenzen tussen kerkelijke structuren poreus en flexibel zijn en ze zetten vraagtekens bij de illusie van liturgische zuiverheid. Dit beschrijf ik in detail in het eerste artikel: 'Taking Liberties: The Fluid

Liturgical Lives of Orthodox and Maronite Women within the Protestant Church in Lebanon’.

In mijn tweede artikel, ‘Itinerant Feasting: Eastern Christian Women Negotiating (Physical) Presence in the Celebration of Easter’, beschrijf ik de manier waarop de vrouwen liturgische feesten vieren. Ik richt mij op de viering van het Paasfeest en op de manier waarop de vrouwen zich bewegen tussen hun moederkerk en de protestantse kerk. In die beweging gaan ze door een onderhandelingsproces heen. Ik neem mijn vertrekpunt in de lichamelijke ervaring van het feest en analyseer op basis daarvan hoe iedere liturgische context de vrouwen fysiek oriënteert en hen lokaliseert in de tijd. Ik zet uiteen hoe hun lichamelijke betrokkenheid verband houdt met de materiële ervaring van aanwezigheid. Door voortdurend te bewegen tussen verschillende vieringen scheppen de vrouwen in kwestie een eigen symbolisch netwerk, waarin zij telkens weer vragen stellen bij de aanwezigheid en afwezigheid van Christus. Door het verweven van feestervaringen brengen de vrouwen hun liturgische en sacramentele theologie in de praktijk.

Wat betreft de huiselijke sfeer onderscheid ik twee invalshoeken. In de eerste draait het om materiële – en in het bijzonder visuele – objecten. Vanuit de tweede invalshoek richt ik mij op handelingen en huiselijke rituelen. Ik benader dezelfde context op twee manieren en interpreteer deze met behulp van verschillende theorieën en metaforen. Het artikel ‘Rearranging Things: How Protestant Attitudes Shake the Objects in the Piety of Eastern Christian Women’ beschrijft hoe de protestantse traditie in het leven van deze vrouwen vraagtekens zet bij de objecten die een rol spelen in hun vroomheid. Objecten in hun geloof die normaalgesproken onopvallend – of zelfs ‘onzichtbaar’ – zijn, botsen met protestantse attitudes en schudden op hun grondvesten door dissonante theologische concepten. Toch behouden deze objecten, zoals iconen, afbeeldingen, stenen, kaarsen, olie en water, iets van het heilige en aarzelen de vrouwen om geheel afstand van hen te doen. In deze troebele situatie worden ‘dingen’ dus minder vanzelfsprekend, maar verschijnen ze ook weer als actieve, flexibele elementen waarmee individuele theologieën worden geschreven en verbanden worden gelegd. Referend aan de woorden van Bruno Latour leg ik uit hoe de ‘dingen’ die een rol spelen in het geloofsleven van deze vrouwen niet vernietigd of geëlimineerd worden, maar vloeibaar en ‘ontvriesd’ (*defreeze framed*).

Vanuit een andere invalshoek richt ik mij ook op de geloofspraktijken thuis. Ik bespreek huiselijke rituelen en alledaagse praktijken van deze vrouwen in het artikel ‘Kinesthetic Piety: Eastern Christian Women’s Varying Practices in Protestant Homes’. Hierin beschrijf ik hoe zij hun huis bewieroken, eten koken en hun dagelijkse routine doorlopen. Ik pleit ervoor deze praktijken te zien als lichamelijke manieren om God te kennen door specifieke handelingen te verrichten. In mijn casus gaat het om verschillende theologische stromingen, waardoor de vrouwen aangezet worden hun praktijken te herzien, veranderen en variëren. Door te ‘knutselen’ met rituelen vormen zij hun theologie en hun religieuze kennis – een kennis die meestal niet–conceptueel is.

Niet alleen het fysieke doen, maar ook het fysieke bewegen tussen geografische locaties is vol betekenis. In het artikel ‘Kinetics of Healing: Protestant Women Pledging Baptism in Saydnaya Orthodox Monastery’ illustreer ik de functie van fysieke beweging aan de hand van een gebruik dat de meesten van deze vrouwen kennen: doop op basis van een gelofte, in dit geval in het orthodoxe klooster van Saydnaya. Ik laat zien hoe de vrouwen in beweging komen in geval van ziekte en op zoek gaan naar genezing. De vrouwen, verkerend in deze complexe liturgische constellatie, hebben behoefte aan een flexibele omgeving die aansluit bij hun situatie en hen helpt om over te steken van de ene situatie naar de andere.

Het laatste artikel, ‘Which Mary? Eastern Christian women bringing their Mary into the Lebanese Protestant Church’, behandelt de rol van de maagd Maria. Maria speelt een belangrijke rol in het geestelijk leven van de vrouwen die aan het onderzoek deelnamen. Doordat zij zich heen en weer bewegen tussen de Protestantse traditie en de andere tradities worden de contrasten tussen deze tradities scherp aangezet en worden ze zich bewust van de discrepantie tussen deze tradities. Net als in de andere aspecten van hun spiritualiteit, nemen ze de vrijheid om een keus te maken tussen de verschillende beschikbare beelden van Maria. De vrouwen stellen dus hun eigen beeld en relatie met Maria samen. Een analyse van de verschillende beelden toont aan dat Maria de vrouwen helpt om hun ervaring van God in te kleuren met elementen die nog ontbraken aan hun geloofsbeleving. In het bijzonder is de aanwezigheid van Maria als een toegankelijke vriendin en moeder die deelt in hun lijden een aanvulling op hun beeld van het goddelijke in plaats van een concurrerende opvatting.

Deze zes artikelen presenteren een caleidoscopisch beeld van de liturgische levens van deze vrouwen waarin beweging, fluiditeit, variatie en persoonlijke constructies een belangrijke rol spelen. In hun veranderlijke geloofspraktijken wordt hun actieve zoektocht en hun geloofsbetrokkenheid zichtbaar. De soms tegengestelde stromingen stimuleren betrokkenheid en creativiteit. Deze creativiteit wordt niet altijd positief beoordeeld door de kerkelijke autoriteiten, maar toch kan deze creativiteit functioneren als een kritische bondgenoot om continue verandering te bewerkstelligen.

Curriculum Vitae

Rima Nasrallah was born in Beirut, Lebanon anno 1976. She is married to Wilbert van Saane of Utrecht and together they have two Children: Christina and Pieter. Rima graduated with a BE in *Electrical Engineering* from the American University of Beirut (AUB) in 1999. In 2003 she got her *Masters in Divinity* (MDiv) from the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in Beirut. After working for five years as director of the department of Christian Education and Spiritual Life in the National Evangelical Church of Beirut (NECB), Rima moved with her family to the Netherlands. At the *Vrij Universiteit (VU)*, Amsterdam she followed the program *Living Reformed Theology* and received her MA in 2009. In 2010 she completed her *Research Masters in Reformed Theology*, also from the *Vrij Universiteit*. Between October 2010 and May 2014, Rima worked on her dissertation as an AIO at the Protestant Theological University (PThU) in Utrecht and then in Amsterdam.

Rima has a number of publications in the field of Christian education and the position of women in the Church, particularly in the Middle East. Currently, she is a member of *Societas Orientalis Liturgica* and of NOSTER. Between 2003 and 2008 she was first a board member and then the chairperson of AROCHA Lebanon, a Christian environmental organization. Also during that time she served as member of the National Committee for Ministers of The Supreme Council of Evangelical Churches in Lebanon and Syria as well as a board member of the Christian Education Committee of the Fellowship of Middle Eastern Evangelical Churches (FMEEC).